

Strengthening SWA engagement at country level: Malawi case study

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This note was written by Clare Battle and James Mambulu, based on research conducted in Malawi in February / March 2017. Research was conducted by WaterAid, under the leadership of the Government of Malawi and on behalf of the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership.

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Acronyms

ADC	Area Development Committee
BBs	SWA Building Blocks
CBs	SWA Collaborative Behaviours
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCT	District Coordination Team
DEC	District Executive Committee
DP	Development Partners
EP&D	Economic Planning and Development
FMM	Finance Ministers' Meeting
GoM	Government of Malawi
HLM	High Level Meeting
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
JSR	Joint Sector Review
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoAIWD	Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Water Development
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NWDP	National Water Development Programme
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
PSIP	Public Service Investment Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIP	Sector Investment Plan
SMM	Sector Ministers' Meeting
SPR	Sector Performance Report
SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
SWG	Sector Working Group
TWG	Technical Working Group
WESNeT	Water and Environmental Sanitation Network

1. Executive summary

The Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Partnership is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to strengthen country processes in order to drive progress towards a common vision of sanitation, hygiene and water for all, always and everywhere.

Recognising the complexity of delivering on this ambition, this case study looks at the history of SWA efforts to enable and strengthen national sector systems in Malawi, and explores how the partnership's vision and objectives can be more effectively operationalised going forward. In this way, it aims to contribute to renewed efforts to ensure SWA's activities are grounded in evidence, and respond to the experiences and needs of partners at country level.

Acknowledging both the progress made in strengthening Malawi's WASH sector, and the steps still needed to build systems and institutions capable of delivering and sustaining services to all, this study finds that SWA engagement has had benefits both as a catalyst for policy dialogue and an opportunity for learning. However, it also finds that the impact of Malawi's engagement in SWA has been undermined by narrow awareness and buy-in, a disconnect between SWA activities and national WASH sector processes, and weak accountability between partners.

On the basis of these findings, a number of key recommendations for the global SWA Partnership are identified:

- a) **Clearly communicate the benefits of SWA engagement**
- b) **Deepen the partnership's focus on strengthening country processes**
- c) **Prioritise alignment with existing country mechanisms and processes**
- d) **Broaden and deepen engagement among existing SWA partners**
- e) **Strengthening mutual accountability**
- f) **Continue to promote tools such as the Collaborative Behaviours and Building Blocks, but allow scope for flexibility and interpretation**
- g) **Explore ways to channel technical support through the joint action of SWA partners**

For partners in Malawi, the study also identifies specific recommendations to help realise the potential of SWA engagement at the national level:

- a) **Use SWA to catalyse support around key in-country processes and opportunities**
- b) **Mainstream SWA engagement under the Sector Working Group**
- c) **Encourage strengthened SWA engagement by all sector partners**
- d) **Use the neutrality of SWA to rise above sector politics**
- e) **Strengthen the Water and Environmental Sanitation Network to increase the effectiveness of CSO engagement**
- f) **Bring the Ministry of Finance back into sector discussions**
- g) **Use the Joint Sector Review as a dynamo for sector progress**

Only through combined action at global and national level will the potential of SWA, and its vision of sanitation, hygiene and water for all, be realised.

2. Introduction

Through the Sustainable Development Goals, the global community has committed to ensure safe and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. The acceleration in coverage needed to achieve this goal will be dependent on the existence of effective country systems and institutions that are capable of planning and delivering safe, sustainable and equitable services for all.

However, globally, the WASH sector has a poor record when it comes to delivering permanent, affordable and accessible services, and rates of progress remain slow. This is due in part to poor targeting of existing finance, a lack of capacity to plan and use funds effectively, and a lack of political will to undertake the reforms necessary to enable progress.

In Malawi good progress has been made in terms of increasing access to safe water, achieving coverage of 86.2% by 2015, exceeding the MDG target of 74%. But progress towards improved sanitation has been much slower; reaching only 42% by 2015, and thus falling somewhat short of the MDG target of 53% (SWA Task Force, 2017). A considerable step change in progress is now needed across the sector, if the country is to realise the even more ambitious targets outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The need to systematise and sustain stakeholder engagement and collaboration around a government-led process remains a particular challenge. In order to make the best of the investments in the sector, Malawi needs strong and functional frameworks for ensuring government-led planning, monitoring of performance, and accountability for investment, to ensure that the country is properly steered towards the attainment of water, sanitation and hygiene for all.

The Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Partnership is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to strengthen country processes in order to drive progress towards a common vision of sanitation, hygiene and water for all, always and everywhere. Recognising the challenges outlined above, SWA partners have come together to take stock of the partnership's country level engagement to date, and make a renewed effort to ensure SWA's activities contribute to more effective development processes at the national and local level.

In February and March 2017 WaterAid, under the leadership of the Government of Malawi and on behalf of the SWA partnership, undertook a case study to analyse and document ongoing sector reform and system strengthening processes in Malawi, and explore how the SWA partnership can strengthen its contribution to those national processes. Research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 28 sector stakeholders, representing government, civil society, bilateral donors, UN agencies and development banks.¹ This case study will complement similar case studies conducted by other SWA partners,² and be used to

¹ A full list of interviewees can be found in Annex 1

² Other case studies are likely to include Madagascar, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso and others. Lead partners will include USAID, UNICEF and IRC.

ensure that the global platform provided by SWA best serves country processes and priorities in Malawi and beyond.

This case study looks at the history of SWA efforts to enable and strengthen national sector systems in Malawi, and explores how the partnership's vision and objectives can best be operationalised going forward. In this way, the case study will help ensure SWA's efforts are grounded in evidence, and respond to the experiences and needs of partners at country level. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the current state of the WASH sector in Malawi, using the framework of the SWA Building Blocks (BBs) and Collaborative Behaviours (CBs). Chapter 3 summarises Malawi's engagement in the SWA partnership to date, and Chapter 4 analyses the strengths and weakness of this engagement in terms of strengthening country processes to drive progress towards sanitation, hygiene and water for all. Based on this analysis, Chapter 5 provides recommendations on how the global SWA partnership can ensure its activities more effectively contribute to the delivery of its objectives at country level. Finally, Chapter 6 provides specific recommendations for partners in Malawi, to help realise the potential of SWA engagement.

3. The state of the WASH sector in Malawi

Malawi's water sector had been working towards an integrative Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) since 2008, with the intention of establishing SWAp governance structures under the overall coordination of the Planning Department within the Ministry of Water Development and Irrigation.³ The National Water Development Programme 2 (NWDP2) which came to an end in 2014 was seen as a precursor to the Water SWAp (WASWAp).

Three building blocks were identified for the implementation of an effective Water SWAp, including a Sector Investment Plan (SIP), a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, and a fiduciary framework. To date the SIP and the M&E framework have been developed with funding from the World Bank and African Development Bank respectively, but the fiduciary framework is still outstanding. A study on financing modalities at district level was also envisaged. Despite some successes – such as the holding of Joint Sector Reviews every year since 2008 – the water sector in Malawi has still a long way to go to achieve a fully functioning SWAp. The biggest challenge has been sector coordination at all levels. Harmonised planning, implementation, joint financing arrangements and monitoring and evaluation, all remain some way off.

Whilst the water sector is still ostensibly working towards a SWAp, there had been little progress for several years, and stakeholders are grappling with how to move forward. The number of different actors involved and the absence of clear leadership mean there is no clear plan, and confidence remains low, particularly among donors. This is compounded by poor understanding between the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD) and development partners (DPs) of the constraints each faced in considering SWAp mechanisms (Sindani, 2016). However,

³ Since 2008 the MoWDI has merged with MoA to form the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD).

interest in SWAp generally remains high, with the exception of those development partners whose organisational structures make it hard to subscribe to an approach that requires programming decisions to be made at country level.

Specific elements of the SWAp are analysed in more detail in the sections below, which follow the structure of the SWA Building Blocks.⁴

3.1 Sector policy / strategy

The Government of Malawi's long term vision and focus for WASH is to achieve universal access to safe water and improved sanitation by 2030, consistent with the SDGs. Specifically:

- Malawi has a vision of achieving 100% coverage of basic water supply and 100% access to basic sanitation services by 2030.
- Malawi aims to achieve access to safely managed water for 40% of urban and 5% of rural populations. For safely managed sanitation, the targets are 50% urban and 30% rural by 2030.

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) provides the overarching strategic framework for development in Malawi, and thus plays a key role in shaping priorities in the medium-term. The MDGS II ran from 2011-2016, and the successor – which will clarify Malawi's vision on SDGs – is currently under development.

Some WASH sector stakeholders were involved in development of MDGSIII in late 2015 / 2016, inputting through a session organised by the department of Economic Planning and Development (EP&D) of the Ministry of Finance. However, due to short notice, mobilisation within the sector was limited, and there has been little consultation since inputs were submitted by all ministries. The current direction was not known at the time of the study.

Within the WASH sector the MGDS is operationalised through a variety of policies (see box 1). In particular:

- The National Sanitation Policy (2008) aims at achieving universal access to improved sanitation by 2020
- The National Water Policy (2005) aims at ensuring sustainable management and utilisation of water resources in order to provide water of acceptable quality and sufficient quantities,

Box 1: WASH Sector Policies

- National Sanitation Policy (2008)
- National Water Policy (2005)
- National Environment Policy (2014)
- National Health Policy (2012)
- National Decentralisation Policy (1995)
- National School Health and Nutrition Policy (2013)
- National 10 Year Sanitation and Hygiene Investment Plan and Strategy (2012 – 2022)
- The Open Defecation Free Strategy (2011 – 2015)
- National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2017 – 2022)
- Malawi Water Sector Investment Plan (2012)

⁴ <http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/building%20blocks%20%20paper.pdf>

and ensure availability of efficient and effective water and sanitation services that satisfy the basic requirement of every Malawian and for the enhancement of the country's national ecosystems.

However, both National Water Policy and National Sanitation Policy are outdated. Currently a consultant is in place to review the National Water Policy but the way forward for the National Sanitation Policy – which is also due for review – is still awaiting direction from the Office of the President and Cabinet. Awareness of these national policies among implementers is often low, and this lack of awareness is mirrored for the numerous different implementation manuals into which the sector has poured considerable resources.

Currently there is no systematic targeting and monitoring of vulnerable populations in Malawi. In cities and urban areas mechanisms for reaching marginalised groups are left to water boards to address through tariff structures; whilst there are plans to expand services to unreached sections of the population, the timeframe for this remains unclear, and relies heavily on big investments from external funders. Rural areas – where coverage is lower – remain the responsibility of the government.

A clear strategy for ensuring sustainability of water and sanitation services is also lacking. Whilst the Government of Malawi does recognise that systems are important, few investments have been made in systems strengthening. Similarly, DPs are not seen as clearly leading the way in terms of investment in system building.

Below the MGDS, programmes and projects are guided by the Public Service Investment Programme (PSIP), which is outlined in more detail below.

3.2 Institutional arrangements

Ministerial arrangements

Prior to the general election of 2014, Malawi had a standalone Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development, which is seen to have helped elevate the prominence of the sector, and catalyse the improvements in sector performance that allowed Malawi to meet the MDG target for water. However, following a restructuring in June 2014, the water sector is now led by the Department of Irrigation and Water Development within the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD).

This merge has had significant implications for Malawi's WASH sector. The country's dependence on agriculture has created an asymmetry between the different arms of the Ministry, and WASH is perceived to have been marginalised as a consequence. This has been exacerbated during recent dry periods, when a government-led irrigation campaign around winter famine led to conflict between agencies responsible for farmers and water boards respectively, both of which now fall within the same ministry. The WASH sector is also seen to have lost key support following the retirement of the Chief Director in October 2016 and the death of the Director of Sanitation and Hygiene in December 2014.

At present leadership for sanitation & hygiene is loosely provided for across two ministries; MoAIWD and Ministry of Health (MoH). However, institutional arrangements for sanitation and hygiene currently remain somewhat confused, and a recent evaluation by WaterAid (Sindani, 2016) highlighted the need to resolve issues around their implementation. At present some sanitation and hygiene activities take place under MoAIWD and some under MoH, but the lack of clear leadership or division of labour have left the issue as an orphan. For example, whilst the current Minister of Health is seen as an ODF Champion, the fact that MoAIWD remains the policy holder has stalled action on regulating the operating environment. Similarly, whilst MoH has structured in place to respond to a cholera crisis, it is not clear that they would be the first port of call. These issues are also exacerbated by the treatment of sanitation largely still as an appendix of water, rather than identifying a clear standalone sanitation programme. Recognition of sanitation as a standalone issue, and resolution of leadership across the two ministries is therefore seen as a priority to allow the sector to move forward.

Water boards

Water services in Malawi's urban towns and market centres are provided by regional or city specific water boards.⁵ These water boards are wholly owned by government.

Water boards face severe challenges in ensuring adequate funding for operations, including both high levels of non-revenue water, and delayed or non-payment by government institutions (the single largest customer). Once again this is an issue which requires cross-governmental dialogue to resolve, but a roundtable with treasury has not yet been organised. In addition to being the sole shareholder and single largest customer, the Government of Malawi is also responsible for approval of tariffs and regulating the sector, creating considerable conflicts of interests.

Once again, the institutional arrangements for sanitation services are less clear, with long standing confusion around the respective roles of water boards and city councils. The roots of this confusion seem to lie in the lack of consistency between the Water Works Act of 1995 and the 1998 Local Government Act, which empower the water boards and city councils respectively. The water boards have support from the ministry and partners such as the World Bank to take over provision of waterborne sanitation services on the basis of the 1995 act, to allow payment for sewerage to be billed alongside water. Such an approach is reiterated in the National Sanitation Policy of 2008, and capacity and resource challenges appear to make councils such as Lilongwe City Council open to such a shift. However, review of legislation by the Ministry of Justice 2-3 years ago concluded that technically the 1998 Local Government Act prevails, and transfer of responsibility to the water boards is possible only after the legislation has been changed. In the absence of strong government leadership to resolve these discrepancies within the legal framework progress has stalled, and the result of this confusion is lack of functioning sewage systems in Malawi's cities.

⁵ There has been some discussion of giving responsibility for village services to the water boards to tackle functionality challenges arising from breakdown of community management approaches, but at the moment responsibility sits with Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, through district councils.

Regulation

As highlighted above, the absence of an independent regulator for water supply & sanitation remains a bottleneck for the sector.⁶ This issue has been on the table for a considerable time and has received support from key sector partners such as the World Bank who have supported necessary preparatory work. But there is still a long way to go, with GoM needed to demonstrate recognition of the importance of reform by showing progress.

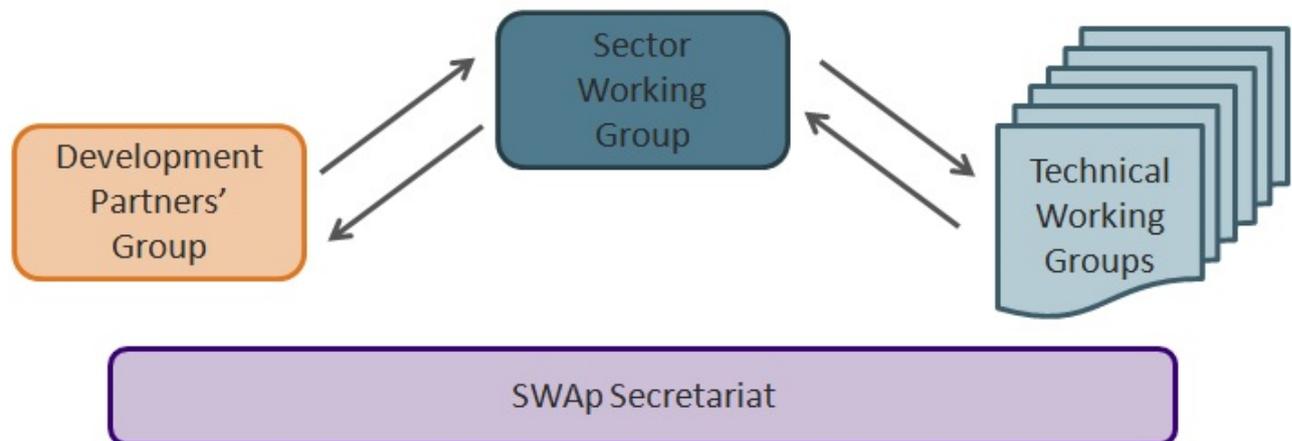
Coordination

Over the past decade there have been ongoing efforts to improve coordination at different levels of Malawi's WASH sector. As a result, a number of key fora are now in place, outlined in more detail below. Overall the Government of Malawi is praised for being very open, and the sector is seen as having good inclusive fora for discussion. However, there are significant challenges in translating this discussion into action and implementation.

Sector Working Group (SWG) and Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

As part of Malawi's movement towards a SWAp, the Planning Division of MoAIWD put in place mechanisms for addressing sector issues through a system of technical working groups (focused on policy issues linked to departments/subsectors), which report to an overarching Sector Working Group. The SWG in turn feeds into a Joint Sector Review (JSR) at the end of year (see below).

Figure 1: Structures of SWAp



Source: EWB Final Report; p2

The SWG is comprised of government (including representatives of MoAIWD, MoLG and MoH) and development partners (including NGOs), and its agenda is shaped by input from the chairs of the Technical Working Groups. The SWG is seen as being

⁶ Regulation for national water resources is operationalised, but there is currently no regulation for water supply & sanitation.

effective to the extent that it meets relatively regularly and is a useful way to present updates from sector partners and potentially identify opportunities for collaboration. However, the quarterly meetings do not always take place as scheduled, and meeting agendas are often crowded, meaning space for substantive discussion is limited and ‘technical’ issues are often bounced back to TWGs.

Development Partners’ Forum

Along with the SWG and TWGs outlined above, the Development Partners’ Forum is part of the key coordination structure envisaged for Malawi’s SWAp (See Figure 1). The Forum is currently chaired by UNICEF, and as a ‘development partners only’ grouping is seen as providing space for DPs to ensure they are not duplicating each other’s work, and can speak to government with one voice on issues such as sector financing. The Forum also provides space for DPs to discuss challenges faced and prepare a common solution to propose to government. However, despite these intentions there is limited evidence of collaboration across DPs; information sharing seems to be limited, and research or resources developed by one partner are rarely taken up by others.

Clusters

Within the Ministry of Health, the Cluster system remains active, with a Health Cluster that reports to the Department of Disaster and Risk Management in the office of the Vice President. There is also an active WASH Cluster in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development that also reports to the Department of Disaster and Risk Management.

The Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WESNET)

It is estimated that 80% of WASH sector resources in Malawi come through CSOs,⁷ and coordination among CSOs, and between CSOs and government, is therefore of critical importance. Efforts to improve coordination have included the creation of the Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (*WESNET*), which was registered in 2011. *WESNET* focuses on building links between CSOs and government, strengthening civil society voice to ensure government is held accountable, enhancing learning and knowledge sharing, and ensuring CSOs themselves are accountable and follow the protocol and guidelines of government.

The important role of the network is widely recognised, with *WENEST*’s inclusion in the SWG, WASH Cluster, and other fora showing the trust and recognition it has earned. There has also been progressive strengthening of coordination among CSOs, particularly by bringing in more local NGOs. However, challenges remain; there is still a strong individualistic spirit among NGOs in Malawi, and the network faces challenges in achieving financial stability. Whilst membership has grown to over 80, very few organisations contribute the annual membership fee.

⁷Draft Sector Progress Review Report, 2015 noted that CSOs contribute more than 80% of the development budget in WASH sector

District level

At the district level sector coordination is achieved through District Coordination Teams (DCT), which work to strengthen collaboration and coordination. However, an evaluation in 2016 found that the weak institutional mandates of DCTs gave room for other stakeholders to use DCT structures to promote organisational agendas. This led to a short term focus, with the agenda for DCT meetings in most districts driven by funding from stakeholders rather than focusing on a district focused sector-wide agenda (Sindani, 2016).

3.3 Sector financing

Box 2: Overview of Malawi's budget process

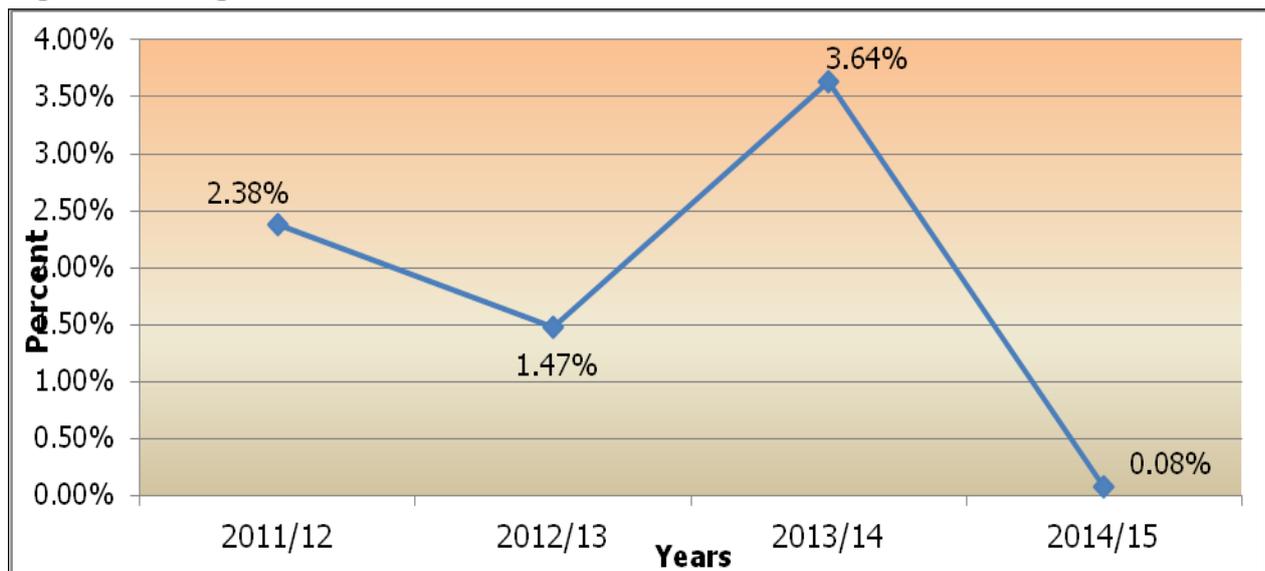
Malawi is guided by a 3-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) with yearly budgetary allocations. Budget ceilings are set by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and passed on to Sector Ministries, who are responsible for preparing a budget and submitting it to MoF for presentation to, and approval by, parliament.

For budgetary purposes the MoAIWD is considered as a whole, and whilst some exceptional programmes, such as fertiliser subsidy, have lines set by MoF, in general it is up to MoAIWD to identify priorities and decide how to allocate funds within the Ministry. The Ministry of Finance is limited to ensuring the Ministry's budget is aligned to national priority areas defined through the National Development Strategy.

Budget hearings are held around March / early April, and represent the key forum in which to lobby for increased allocation within the bounds of nationally defined priorities. Any more significant change in priority for WASH would need to come through in Malawi's medium term Growth and Development Strategy, which is renewed every five years.

Financing remains a critical challenge for Malawi's WASH sector. Figure 2 below outlines financing to Malawi's WASH sector between 2011 and 2015 (WESNET 2015), showing substantial fluctuation in resources going to the sector. The trends reveal retrogressive funding between 2011/12 and 2012/13,⁸ thereafter increasing sharply to the highest funding level in 2013/14 representing 3.6% of the overall national budget. This was followed by a considerable drop in allocation for 2014/15 fiscal year to 0.08%, and further investigations show another significant drop for 2015/16 fiscal year down to 0.02% of the national budget. Initiatives at sector level to lobby for increased funding have had limited impact, and low budget allocations are exacerbated by the fact disbursements are generally even lower than approved allocations.

⁸ Figures in the SPR (2014) differ slightly from those shown above, indicating a 2.3% allocated to WASH for the 201/213 fiscal year.

Figure 2: Budget commitments for WASH


Source: 2014/15 WESNET WASH Budget Analysis

Inadequate financing is an issue that cuts across all ministries, and the Department of Irrigation and Water Development has not been successful in advocating for a significant increase in allocations for WASH at budget hearings. The budget of MoAIWD as a whole is significant, but with a high proportion of funds going to agriculture – in particular fertiliser subsidy programme– the allocation for WASH remains low, despite the fact that water is identified as a priority in almost all previous Growth & Development Strategies. MoAIWD is widely criticised as a weak advocate for water and sanitation programmes, and for demonstrating little leadership in putting forward government financing initiatives in WASH.

The governance issues outlined above also have consequences for sector financing. Whilst tariff levels for the water boards are supposed to be sufficient for full cost recovery, control of tariffs remains politically driven, and current revenue levels have undermined the development of sustainable funding streams, and left the sector reliant on donors for large investments. The lack of an independent regulator in water supply sector also creates risks for private sector players who might otherwise have moved into the sector, and whilst other sectors such as education have had considerable success with public private partnerships, ongoing discussions in the WASH sector have yet to lead to results and there is little leadership at national level towards mobilisation and regulation of private sector investment for WASH.

Financing remains particularly critical at district level. Malawi's decentralisation process means that at district level WASH financing is the responsibility of local government finance committees. However, the proportion of sector allocation at district level is even lower than the proportion of funding from treasury to the sector,⁹ and large projects are still controlled at the national level. The mandate for ensuring

⁹ WaterAid 2016 evaluation found that the proportion of funding from treasury to sector was consistently higher (6.54% and 3.64%) than proportion of sector allocation at district level (0.34% and 0.25%) for the periods 2014/15 and 2013/14 fiscal years respectively.

funding for WASH at local level remains unclear; MoAIWD doesn't debate budgets for districts, whilst MoLG will only provide quality control of district development plans and policy direction, and not lobby on behalf of a specific sector. This is compounded by the fact that WASH is not represented at director level at district level, and thus does not necessarily sit on local government financing committees where budget is decided. This has consequences for the sector's ability to advocate for resource allocation and enforce policies and procedures at district level. However, some development partners have been working with local district stakeholders to develop district sector investment plans to guide, advocate and mobilise resources for the sector. There have also been advocacy campaigns to increase devolution of funds to districts, and help identify an essential funding package.

Malawi's WASH sector remains heavily dependent on external resources, with DP investment accounting for more than 80% of the development resources in the sector.¹⁰ However, despite Malawi's efforts to move towards a SWAp, at the moment there is no clear financing mechanism for the WASH sector in Malawi. Underlying contextual issues such as the 2014 "cashgate" and the need to streamline sector policies have impacted on this lack of progress, and have continuing implications for attaining a realistic and long lasting solution to sector financing (Sindani, 2016).

At national level investment in the WASH sector is supposedly guided by a Sector Investment Plan (SIP), which was finalised in March 2012 with the support of the World Bank. However, the plan has never been widely disseminated or popularised and there is limited evidence of its use in sector planning. There is no roadmap or action plan for operationalisation of the SIP, and there are questions around whether it is still relevant. Hopes that the SIP would bring investments together have not been realised, and whilst there are ongoing efforts to work out arrangements for basket funding, this is widely seen as being a long way away. Considerable DP funding remains off-budget, and thus beyond the awareness of EP&D.

3.4 Planning, monitoring and review

Planning

Box 3: Overview of Malawi's planning process

Projects and programmes submitted to MoF as part of the annual budget discussions described in Box 2 are appraised by the Public Sector Investment Unit in the MoF'S Planning Division, to ensure they are in accordance with the MDGS and sectoral policies. Projects that pass this scrutiny find their way into the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) document, which provides a compendium of all public projects and programmes, and acts as a key tool for the implementation of the MDGS. However, not all projects in PSIP will necessarily be funded, depending on the availability of resources. The presence of programmes on a particular issue such as WASH in the PSIP is dependent on prioritisation given by the relevant sector ministry – in this case MoAIWD.

¹⁰ Source: Ministry of Finance Approved Estimates of Expenditure on Recurrent and Capital Budget for the Financial Year 2015/2016 (Output based) via WaterAid June 2016

At district level District Executive Committees (DECs) meet quarterly, with each sector presenting what they're doing and challenges faced, based on inputs and plans from Area Development Committees (ADCs). Projects are then presented at council level for endorsement.

As of yet Malawi has not developed a clear financing plan to reach the SDGs. Within the WASH sector, many plans have existed, both at strategic and investment levels, including the Malawi Water Sector Investment Plan (see above). However, these have not been aligned,¹¹ and have not been widely adopted as the basis by which to direct investments to the sector (EWB, 2016). They also do not appear to be aligned to Malawi's broader national budgeting and planning process, outlined in boxes 2 and 3.

The lack of alignment between plans has made it difficult for these to be used to direct investments, or to build confidence that investment decisions are being made on strategic and evidence-based criteria. At present discussion of plans between government and DPs seems to happen on an ad hoc basis, with each donor approaching government separately and developing a separate MoU. Some donors are explicitly guided by the PSIP, only taking forward projects that are part of the government's own planning tool but for which the government itself does not have adequate resources. There are also donors that prefer to come up with their own projects, but these should still be aligned and done in liaison with ministry.

Monitoring & reporting

Whilst Malawi's education and health sectors have advanced government-led monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in place, continuing weaknesses in the Monitoring and Evaluation framework within the WASH sector have been noted as a major bottleneck.

Significant investment has been made at national level to develop a sector-wide M&E framework, related M&E tools and databases to facilitate implementation of M&E work across the sector, and to link these to increased monitoring capacity at district level (Sindani, 2016). However, operationalising this framework has been a major challenge. EWB, WaterAid and other stakeholders such as African Development Bank have provided embedded support to disseminate the framework to district councils, and support the roll out of the sector database. But results have been mixed; there are outstanding challenges in connecting districts to national database, and only a few districts have submitted the requested 6 monthly reports. Many of those who benefited from the original trainings have also now moved on, and partners report not having seen any aggregation of collected data for 2 years.

The government is making renewed efforts to take this forward through follow up with in 5 districts, supported by AfDB. EWB work to map the roles and

¹¹ EXAMPLE: In 2010 an urban development master plan for Lilongwe was developed with support from JICA, due to run to 2030. The plan covered waste and sanitation, transport and other urban utilities. Subsequently LWB have engaged the World Bank and others to formulate a new Lilongwe city sanitation master plan (liquid waste, solid waste, drainage). It is unclear which plan currently provides the framework for the city.

responsibilities in the M&E system has also helped to clarify the missing links which were hampering the functioning of the system, and may help identify steps for moving forward. But at present the vision of a system that brings together all reporting from all actors from the districts up remains unrealised, and as of now there is no national M&E system for WASH into which DP data is entered.

A number of DPs currently share reports with the MoAWID about programme(s) that they are implementing and budgets, but there is currently no formal system of reporting, nor any way of consolidating what different partners are doing to account for all sector resources. Whilst there are mechanisms in place that could be used (particularly the Joint Sector Review and Sector Performance Report) there does not seem to be any leadership to move in this direction. Some DPs acknowledged that because of the lack of institutionalised systems for monitoring and reporting at the sector level, their focus tends to be on reporting to their own headquarters, whose interest in tracking impact is perceived to be much higher than that of the Government of Malawi.

NGO reporting has been a particular challenge; NGOs were not involved in broader sector reporting until recently, and “not even the government knows what [they] are doing”. There are signs of progress; for the first time last year the annual Sector Performance Report (SPR) included a chapter on NGOs, and WESNET has been mandated by government to complement government by reporting on NGO activities. However, this mandate is not yet strong enough to allow WESNET to collect and coordinate comprehensive information –at the moment reporting is voluntary, and of more than 100 NGOs active in the sector only 32 provided information for the 2016 report.

An NGO board was created through an act of Parliament to regulate the operations of NGOs in Malawi, but – in spite of this – the operations of NGOs are not strictly monitored in Malawi. The perceived ineffectiveness of these processes – particularly due to problems within information management – has caused some NGOs to shift to focus on sharing information with district councils.

Review

A Joint Sector Review (JSR) process was introduced in Malawi in 2008, with an annual review usually taking place in December of each year.¹² A Sector Performance Report is produced as an input to the meeting, and undertakings are recorded in an Output Report, which is presented to SWG. The JSR is managed by the Planning Department of MoAWID, which constitutes a task force to lead the preparatory work and agree key themes which are then taken to SWG for approval.

The regularity with which the JSR has been organised over the past 8 years is a considerable achievement of Malawi’s WASH sector, and it is seen as a unique opportunity to bring together a wide range of sector actors – often at a reasonably high level – who may not otherwise attend discussion or learning fora. The review is

¹² The possibility of moving the meeting to September to allow more time for discussions to feed into budget discussions is currently being explored.

seen as a useful opportunity to discuss issues on the ground, and succeeds in bringing the sector together around the table every year to agree undertakings.

However, it is widely recognised that the JSR is not yet fulfilling its function as a driver of sector reform, and improvements are urgently needed.

Whilst the SPR is presented and shared, there is not currently much real discussion or dialogue around the findings, and there is a feeling that the sector is just “ticking a box” rather than utilising the JSR as a serious opportunity for in-depth dialogue, challenge, and course correction. For example, droughts have been a big issue over the past 2 years, but the JSR is seen to have missed an opportunity for in-depth analysis of the challenges and policy options in this area. The SPR itself is also undermined by the fact that there is little evidence of an ongoing process of information sharing; rather people come together one month before the meeting to try and produce the report in an ad hoc, one-off way – and as a result it does not offer a true reflection of what is happening in the sector. Such incomplete data makes it difficult to foster evidence-based decisions for improving service delivery in the sector.

The process is also felt to lack the candid debate between government and DPs on challenges, roles, and responsibilities that has been achieved in other countries. The majority of participants make presentations on topics of their own choosing that are unchallenged by other stakeholders, and there is seldom scope to compare activities against previous commitments or plans. This creates a culture in which it is hard to discern progress; issues of discussion are always the same, and undertakings often get postponed from one year to the next without any real attempts to find solutions. One stakeholder commented that “if we look across the JSR reports for the last 10 years we would see there has been no change – we are reporting same thing, copy and paste, even sometimes word for word”.

This failure to link the JSR to a clear reform process is seen as a result of weak sector leadership, and a lack of accountability. Whilst the process – particularly the development of the SPR – previously received support from consultants engaged with funding from DPs, this was found not to be sustainable. Leadership has since passed to government, but capacity remains limited. The disconnect from budget discussions is also a key constraint, as there is no clarity on how resources will be generated to take forward identified undertakings. 6-7 years ago the Director of Debt and Aid in the Ministry of Finance would come to the WASH JSR meeting, but this engagement was lost along the way.

3.5 Capacity building

Outstanding human resources gaps in Malawi’s WASH sector are seen as a major obstacle to the attainment of the MGDs, SDGs and other country priorities, requiring continued investment and advocacy. The vacancy rate in the water sector currently stands at 60% (MoAIWD, 2016), exacerbated by additional capacity challenges related to the knowledge of those people already in place. There has not yet been detailed analysis of capacity gaps, but challenges appear to be particularly intense at district and community levels, and in relation to M&E capacity.

Some efforts have been made to address capacity gaps, for example through efforts to strengthen the capacity of rural communities to manage water points. But generally speaking most capacity building support to date has been approached by DPs and government on a project-by-project basis, and mostly focused on training for project-related activities and skills workshops, with little or no focus on long-term sector capacity development needs (EWB, 2016). There is therefore still a need to come up with a government-led & needs-based overarching capacity development plan for WASH human resources in Malawi.

3.6 Collaborative Behaviours

To complement the sector Building Blocks, SWA has identified four Collaborative Behaviours¹³ that can provide an indication of the extent to which governments and development partners are working together effectively to improve long-term sector performance and sustainability in Malawi.

Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes

Weak political will, particularly in terms of leadership that extends beyond commitment making to high level championing of a sector reform agenda, was commonly cited as a reason for lack of progress in Malawi's WASH sector. Within government there is recognition that without clear government commitment to move forward, engagement of donors will remain a challenge – first there is a need for government to “get our own house in order”. In particular, government is encouraged to exercise more power in ensuring DP investment and NGO activities are aligned to national and sector plans; to date GoM has hesitated to leverage their role in providing strategic and regulatory leadership to the sector to focus development efforts. Examples of stronger government leadership in mobilising partners are apparent in other sectors including health, aided by the existence of basket fund.

There is also recognition that DPs need to support MoAIWD to lead the sector, with DPs themselves pointing to the need for closer alignment of partners' support to government programmes. However, there are some ways of working that work against this, particularly among donors and development banks whose organisational activities are bound by multiyear strategies, or dictated by projects approved at headquarters level. Harmonisation of sector policies has also been identified as a precursor to further aligning of the strategic and investment plans for the sector.

Strengthen and use country systems

As outlined above, while efforts have been made to establish mechanisms and systems that all sector players can feed into, these are not yet all in place, and key systems – such as monitoring and evaluation – remain weak or absent. *Cashgate* has also left a legacy of distrust in government systems.

Use one information and mutual accountability platform

Whilst various accountability structures have been put in place, mutual accountability is widely recognised as weak or absent from Malawi's WASH sector, and many

¹³ <http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/about/the-four-swa-collaborative-behaviours/>

stakeholders have highlighted the urgent need for the sector to take serious measures to ensure all WASH agencies and organisations are accountable.

In particular, there are calls to strengthen the accountability of development partners; whilst the capacity and resources committed to WASH by NGOs and DPs exceed those of government, there is a perception that “too much time” has been spent holding government accountable without also holding DPs accountable. NGO and donor accountability was widely cited as a significant challenge, with NGOs in particular perceived as unwilling to be held accountable for their financing, and failing to operate in ways that support institutional sustainability, even where this is championed as a key value. WESNET has made some strides to address this by encouraging members to fulfil basic obligations, and some NGOs are demonstrating good practice by trying as much as possible to be accountable in terms of sharing information and reporting to government at different levels. However, these processes remain voluntary, and mechanisms to ensure accountability still need to be further strengthened.

Build sustainable financing strategies

As outlined above, programmes of work and budgets for institutions – including national government, district governments, funding donors and NGOs – have historically been independently developed and managed, making it difficult for government to build a comprehensive understanding of funds going into the sector (EWB, 2016). In particular, analysis of sector financial data from central government revealed glaring gaps in terms of sector funding contributions from civil society organisations which implement WASH projects outside the national fiscal plan (Sindani, 2016). Once again the health sector provides examples of more collaborative behaviour, with efforts to set up an aid coordination unit in the Ministry of Health to track all resources and compile a full picture of what is happening.

The gap between commitments and disbursements also remains a big challenge for the WASH sector, reducing predictability of funds and undermining efficient and effective use of resources. Domestic financing is less problematic, as MoF is able to run projections, but unpredictability of donor financing is an acute problem, with donors regularly changing commitments over the course of the year during the implementation of the budget.

4. Brief overview of Malawi’s engagement in SWA to date

Malawi has been an official SWA partner since March 2012, and has been engaged to varying degrees in most SWA meetings (see Box 4). The primary channels of information on SWA are seen as UNICEF and MoAIWD, and activities are led by government with very strong support from a task force in which UNICEF and WaterAid have been the most active players. In general Malawi has taken a reactive approach to SWA, engaging primarily in response to High Level Meetings or reporting requirements.

Ahead of the 2012 HLM, efforts were made to constitute a country level technical team to support Malawi’s mobilisation around the HLM process. This process had high level support from the Principal Secretary (PS) and director of sanitation, and

Box 4: Malawi's participation in SWA meetings**

2010 Finance Ministers Meeting: Malawi participated as an observer, name of attendee(s) unknown

2012 Finance Ministers Meeting: Malawi listed as participating in the SWA High Level Meeting Process, but there was no representation from Malawi at the FMM itself

2012 Partnership Meeting: Malawi represented by Mr. McLawrence Mpsa, Director of Sanitation and Hygiene, Ministry of Water Development and Hygiene

2014 Finance Ministers Meeting: Malawi represented by Ms. Erica Maganga, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

2014 Sector Minister Meeting: Malawi represented by:

- Hon. Mr Chikumbutso Hiwa, Deputy Minister of Health of the Republic of Malawi
- Hon. Ms Anitta Kalinde, Minister of Water Development and Irrigation of the Republic of Malawi
- Mr Humphreys Dzanjo Masuku, Deputy Director of Preventive Health Services of the Republic of Malawi
- Mr McLawrence Mpsa, Director of Sanitation of the Republic of Malawi
- Mrs Erica Maganga, Principal Secretary of the Republic of Malawi
- Ms Jane Nankwenya, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Republic of Malawi to the United States of America
- Ms Mercy Tahuna

**Based on information available via the SWA website. Malawi's participation in the 2012 and 2016 Sector Ministers Meetings and 2013 and 2015 Partnership meetings is unknown.

there was engagement from the Ministry of Finance. After the HLM a visit from the SWA Civil Society Coordinator helped to broaden understanding of SWA among CSOs, raising awareness of SWA as a tool for strengthening national dialogue. Nonetheless the process started to lose momentum after the April HLM, and SWA engagement tailed off until the next HLM in 2014. Malawi was also engaged in preparations ahead of the SWA Sector Ministers' Meeting in 2016, with partners coming together to brief the minister prior to his attendance.

Preparations for the 2017 HLMs were kicked off on the side-lines of Malawi's 2016 JSR, with WaterAid bringing a small number of partners together to agree how to support the process. An SWA Task Force made up of representatives from MoAIWD, Unicef, WaterAid and WESNet has been actively following the process outlined the SWA Secretariat, with occasional engagement from other participants. The focus has been on meeting the requirements set for the meetings by SWA through information gathering and initial assessment against the 'guiding questions',¹⁴ with the results presented to the wider sector for broader endorsement

¹⁴ Supporting materials for the preparatory process of the SWA 2017 HLMs are available here: <http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/news/preparatory-process-for-2017-hlms/>

through a multi-stakeholder workshop convened on 6th March 2017.¹⁵ Invitations to this workshop were sent by the PS to encourage wide attendance, but turnout among DPs was low, with no bilateral donors or development banks in attendance.

It is expected that Malawi will be represented at the FMM by the Minister of Finance and at the SMM by the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, and the Minister of Health.¹⁶

5. Key findings

5.1 Awareness of SWA

Awareness of SWA varies across and within different agencies and organisations, but in general was concentrated among a small group of active members of the SWA Task Force. Within government awareness is high among key personnel in the Department of Water Supply Services, but low within the Planning Division responsible for leading the SWG and broader SWAp process. Among donors and development banks there was sometimes vague recognition of the SWA name, but little detailed understanding of its work or their own organisation's role within the partnership – even among those whose headquarters-based colleagues are actively engaged through the SWA Steering Committee or Task Teams. In one case a donor mentioned learning about SWA through an internal induction programme, but generally speaking DPs attributed awareness of SWA to passing sector discussions or international events. Interestingly, a number of donors seemed surprised by their own lack of awareness, citing examples of other global partnerships with which they were more familiar.

Among those who had heard of SWA, there was generally awareness that SWA is not a funding body, with the visit from the SWA CSO advisor in 2012 credited with providing important clarification in this respect, particularly among CSOs. Broadly, SWA is recognised as a tool to help partners push for universal access and achieve the SDG goals on water and sanitation,¹⁷ with a specific focus on commitment generation. Despite the shift in focus of the 2017 HLPD, SWA is still widely seen as “mostly something where commitments are made, rather than how they operationally play out on the ground”.

Awareness of the SWA Building Blocks and Collaborative Behaviours is strongest with the government focal point, who came across them both through the 2016 SMM and preparations for the 2017 HLM. Select DPs are also familiar with them, most noticeably WaterAid and EWB, with others such as UNICEF and WFP aware to a lesser extent. Both EWB and WFP credited awareness of the BBs and CBs to presentations at international conferences and fora, rather than discussions at

¹⁵ N.B. At the time of this case study Malawi had not yet completed the GLAAS assessment, and did not have a Collaborative Behaviours country profile as a tool to use during the preparatory process.

¹⁶ Since this case study was conducted, the State President has appointed Honourable Aggrey Masi, MP as Deputy Minister of Agriculture Irrigation and Water Development on 14th March.

¹⁷ SWA's efforts to give prominence to sanitation, in name at least, were welcomed by one interviewee, who stressed the uniqueness of putting sanitation first, and water following.

country level. Overall awareness of the components of the SWA framework was very low among WASH sector stakeholders in Malawi.

5.2 Strengths of SWA engagement

Catalyst for advocacy

Among those familiar with SWA, the partnership – and the high level meetings in particular – are primarily appreciated for stimulating a conversation about WASH at the global level. As the only such forum at the global level, it is seen as playing an important role in WASH policy dialogue, and promoting the importance of financial allocation for WASH.

The meetings in Washington DC are also seen as having useful impact at country level by mobilising high profile figures to lobby ministers to increase finance to the sector, and helping the Minister of Finance understand sector needs and issues. The engagement between sector ministers and finance ministers is also particularly welcomed.

Whilst it is not possible to pinpoint any particular changes in domestic financing or policy that can be attributed to SWA, some stakeholders felt the high level meetings had been “a contributor to whatever resources we get”, although there is no way to verify this. There are also positive examples of partners at country level using SWA commitments to support lobbying on particular issues, such as devolution of money to districts, and WESNET and EWB cited SWA commitments as a key tool in their work to lobby for increased financing to the WASH sector.

Framework for dialogue on sector weaknesses and blockages

Although awareness of SWA’s aim to strengthen country processes was considerably lower than its activities around increasing high level political prioritisation, there is noticeable enthusiasm for SWA’s increasing focus on system strengthening among those “in the know”.

Stakeholders actively engaged in preparations for the 2017 HLM welcomed the shift in emphasis towards strengthening country processes and mechanisms, and identifying strategies for resource generation, rather than repeating “the same old song”. SWA’s role in highlighting the building blocks of an effective sector and supporting countries to understand the challenges and steps needed to meet the SDGs was cited as a key benefit of engaging with the partnership:

“Now it is more than just giving targets – we are looking at issues like resource mobilisation, and whether we are doing the right things to get where we want to be. Before it was just lip service to impress someone – now there is more thought on what the activity will cost, whether we have the resources”

Member of SWA Task Force

The SWA Building Blocks and Collaborative Behaviours were highlighted by the Government focal point as useful tools that had helped the government assess the sector in a comprehensive way, capturing well the kinds of issues Malawi is grappling with – particularly in terms of M&E and mutual accountability, and the need

for changes in attitude and practice in key strategic areas. The SWA framework had helped the task force capture and understand these issues, and there was hope that they could be used to guide the sector towards a holistic approach.

Other stakeholders within the SWA task force also recognised the value of these tools, which had helped shift SWA engagement from something that was done because it was a global organisational imperative, to something that made sense at country level because it focused on issues partners were struggling with, such as coordination. By “boxing certain challenges in a way that they can be tackled” the SWA Building Blocks and Behaviours had helped partners come together to think through issues in a structured way that had otherwise been missing from existing discussions within the SWG and JSR. One partner also reported using the language of the SWA CBs and BBs to frame recommendations and advocacy messages.

Unfortunately, the small number of partners engaged in the SWA Task Force or aware of the BB and CBs has limited the scope of these discussions. But even among those not familiar with these tools, there was an emphasis on the need for SWA to focus on helping the sector “put in the building blocks”, and catalyse discussion of how support for the sector could be better channelled to strengthen government systems. A recurring point of emphasis was that, whilst it would be useful to have a broad global framework to guide dialogue, there would need to be space for different articulations and interpretations to reflect the reality of Malawi’s WASH sector.

Neutral forum

Part of SWA’s perceived value is its ability to bring partners together in a neutral forum that is not owned by only one organisation with a particular agenda. In Malawi SWA is seen as having neutrality that doesn’t come with other processes, enabling it to provide space for challenging conversations about sector progress that would not go far in the JSR.

Opportunity for learning

In addition to raising the profile of WASH among key Ministers, the high level meetings organised by SWA are seen as having provided useful learning opportunities, particularly where they have facilitated discussion between ministers from Malawi and those from other countries. In this way they have helped build awareness of key issues and priorities, with the government’s interest in engaging in SWA as a means to access resources used as a hook to expose them to discussions about efficiency and effectiveness.

5.3 Weaknesses of SWA engagement

Despite the positive factors outlined above, in many ways Malawi’s experience of SWA to date provides quite a challenge to the partnership’s current mode of operation. A significant number of partners saw SWA as having little tangible impact; and even those that acknowledged its impact in terms of global advocacy suggested that “for national processes it is not really adding anything”. A number of explanations given for these weaknesses are summarised below.

Failure to link with national processes

Whilst SWA's objectives are seen as being in line with what the WASH sector in Malawi is working towards, there has been little in terms of integration with national targets and processes. SWA is treated as "a different animal altogether", and engagement is almost entirely separate from broader sector activities. This failure to link with national process is seen as a critical weakness, and an important learning for future SWA engagement.

A key opportunity to embed SWA in country processes was missed in the early days of Malawi's engagement, which coincided with the country's efforts to set up a Water SWAp. Unfortunately, SWA has instead become seen as "yet another work stream": a parallel process primarily focused on reporting to international, external forces and demands, and which is perceived as "something we're doing as an obligation, rather than being passionate about it ourselves, and having a proper plan of our own." As a result, SWA processes have not been embedded within broader sector structures or processes for coordination, planning, budgeting, implementation and review. This is particularly apparent when it comes to sector processes for developing and reviewing actions and undertakings, where there remains a disconnect between the development and reporting of SWA commitments and Malawi's JSR.

This is seen as a key factor behind the lack of perceived impact on the ground, with no mechanisms in place to ensure commitments or policy recommendations stimulated by SWA meetings are carried forward through processes at country level. Instead SWA activities tend to go quiet after each meeting until the next time to report or prepare comes round. Another consequence of the separation between SWA and other sector processes has been the narrowing of engagement to "a small elite group talking about SWA, and everyone else wondering what it is". This is further exacerbated by a residual impression that SWA is a UNICEF initiative, rather than being led by government.

Although such reflections were frequently raised with reference to the previous SWA model of commitments generation, it is clear that similar challenges continue today, with SWA engagement still disconnected from the wider WASH sector. Efforts have been made to close this gap, for example by flagging SWA to the SWG, but the lack of time for in depth discussion means it has not yet been possible to use this group to build understanding and engagement. As a result, SWA in Malawi is still seen as a "once a year process" involving an isolated few, and there were repeated calls for the importance of linking to country processes and embedding in sector governance to be made much more explicit from the outset in SWA messaging and guidance documents.

Narrow engagement

As mentioned above, active engagement in SWA in Malawi remains limited to relatively few actors, predominantly within government, UNICEF and civil society.

The SWA Task Force is inclusive to all those who want to join, but to date efforts to bring more stakeholders to the table have not been successful.¹⁸

Particularly noticeable is the absence of development banks, and bilateral and multilateral donors other than UNICEF, with even those who are aware of SWA not taking an active role. Generally, this is attributed to a lack of awareness and understanding of the strategic importance of SWA among DPs at country level, with many citing the lack of guidance from their own headquarters on the level of organisational commitment that should be shown to SWA. Even where there has been inter-organisational communication on SWA (such as one bilateral donor who recalled learning about SWA as part of an internal induction programme), this doesn't seem to have translated down into active engagement at country level.

Limitations in understanding and awareness are particularly apparent with the SWA Building Block and Collaborative Behaviours, which are predominantly being taken forward by “those that are already convinced” and have actively sought out better awareness of the tools. It is not clear that the tools are reaching many additional stakeholders that are not already convinced of their importance.

This lack of completeness undermines one of the key strengths of SWA, namely its ability to facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue around the bottlenecks and remedial policy options within the WASH sector. This is a particular disadvantage in a country such as Malawi, in which DPs remain the main financier for the WASH sub-sector. Without clear commitment from DPs it is difficult to convince ministers that SWA represents an opportunity to drive progress across the sector as a whole, and the ‘compact’ of government commitment and reciprocal donor response (with resources or behaviour change) is broken. It also means the WASH sector is missing out on opportunities to utilise DP “power” to drive conversation forward – many donors have links with MoF through high level forums or committees, but the WASH sector has never effectively used this channel to raise issues for discussion, or to push for follow up meetings.

Weak accountability

A particular consequence of both the lack of alignment between SWA and sector processes and the absence of key sector partners from SWA discussions is a lack of follow up and accountability around SWA commitments or activities.

The majority of stakeholders were unaware of any follow up in previous years, exacerbated by the absence of a process for capturing information about what is agreed or discussed outside Malawi (e.g. through SWA HLMs) and translating this for the local context. The latter point is seen as a result of the lack of a culture of responsibility for things that happen overseas; there is an understanding that what government officials do outside Malawi “is their business”, and thus pressure for follow up meetings is limited. However, there is recognition that without this, “the minister knows no one will ask so he will say whatever he likes”.

¹⁸ Invitations to the SWA Stakeholder Workshop on 6th March were sent out by the Principle Secretary to try and catalyse wider participation, but there was still no attendance by bilateral donors or development banks.

As a result, SWA HLMs are seen as useful opportunities to give ministers ideas, but of limited use for accountability purposes. Numerous stakeholders argued for a stronger focus on strengthening decision making and accountability in Malawi, rather than “up there” through a globally driven process. National mechanisms for follow up, review and course correction through country processes are seen as the most important way of ensuring impact.

The lack of DP engagement mentioned above has also undermined efforts to foster mutual accountability around SWA, due to the lack of evidence of government engagement being matched by any reciprocal efforts from donors or NGOs.

Commitments not linked to finance

A key objective of SWA’s High Level Meetings has been to foster a reform agenda between sector and finance ministers. However, there is limited evidence of SWA engagement leading to impacts on funding allocations for WASH in Malawi, and the partnership does not seem to have helped the sector strengthen its relationship with MoF.

Efforts have been made to use the support of SWA to bring political and financial leadership to WASH; initially MoF did participate in SWA processes, and there was some progress in building their understanding of the real issues facing the sector. But this interest has since waned, and MoF is not involved in the analysis and discussions that form the SWA preparatory process. Furthermore, commitments and actions identified by the government of Malawi as part of SWA processes have not been linked to a resourcing strategy, and there has been no budget in place for their operationalisation. As a result, the “pomp” of High Level Meetings has taken place in isolation from any “financial realism”, and it is considered unsurprising that it has not led to any sustainable movement in the sector.

Commitments not tackling operational challenges

Whilst the lack of a clear plan for financing and follow up of SWA commitments is seen as a primary weakness, stakeholders also expressed concern that in previous years commitments had focused on the “wrong things”. SWA is seen as “mainly about infrastructure”, and lacking a focus on the “softer side” of systems strengthening. The 2012 SWA HLM coincided with the development of Malawi’s Sector Investment Plan, which also has a heavy infrastructure focus that was exacerbated through commitments made at global fora such as SWA. Whilst it was acknowledged that some of the SWA commitments made by governments were more practical, these tended not to be the ones people saw referenced and quoted (which were often limited to budget allocations or access figures), and there were calls for SWA to put more emphasis on operational inputs and goals. Although SWA has made efforts to redress this in recent years through tools such as the Building Blocks and Collaborative Behaviours, it is clear that many partners at country level remain unaware of these shifts.

Challenges with political leadership and engagement

The weaknesses in government leadership outlined above have also had consequences for SWA engagement. There is still a sense that convening of SWA meetings and enforcement of activities is reliant on donors or NGOs, which moves the ownership away from government. There are also concerns around the strength and breadth of government engagement in SWA. Whilst the government focal point's contribution and passion is widely praised, the extent to which engagement has the support of the Principle Secretary (PS) is not clear, and there is certainly scope for government to do more to take leadership and internalise SWA.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that stakeholders are still struggling to achieve the right balance of engagement across the various levels of government. Malawi has been subject to frequent ministerial changes during the course of its membership of SWA, often in close proximity to HLMs (see Box 5), meaning gains in political will achieved through SWA activities have been short-lived. This has triggered debate on whether SWA is targeting the right level with its focus on ministers. Whilst there is recognition that ministers are important, there is widespread feeling that more attention needs to be given to the engagement of technical support staff and – in particular – the Principle Secretary. Engagement at this level is seen as particularly important in ensuring gains made through SWA are maintained and integrated into cabinet priorities and national plans.

6. Key recommendations for SWA

Based on the above analysis, it is clear that whilst SWA has had some positive impact to date, significant changes are needed in how the partnership's objectives are operationalised to ensure SWA fulfils its potential and delivers on its promise to strengthen country processes in order to drive progress towards sanitation, hygiene and water for all. Key recommendations are summarised below:

a) Communicate the benefits of SWA engagement

In a crowded and busy sector, SWA needs to think carefully and critically about the benefits it brings, and communicate these to all constituencies, focusing not just on the SWA 'brand' but on the strategic importance and value of the conversations and actions that are driving the sector forward. Currently a number of major partners in the sector don't know anything about SWA or how they can contribute, and others have shown limited interest because the value of the partnership is unclear. In the words of one stakeholder, "it isn't clear what SWA is trying to do".

Current channels of communication – which rely heavily on messages being passed down from headquarters-level, or filtered through one or two in-country focal points – do not seem to

Box 5: Key ministerial changes in Malawi's WASH sector

- April 2012 – death of President Bingu wa Mutharika
- June 2014 – [Minister Chiyembekeza](#) appointed to MoAIWD
- April 2016 – [Minister Chiyembekeza](#) replaced by Minister Chaponda
- February 2017 – Minister Chaponda dismissed
- 14th March 2017 – Aggrey Masi appointed as Deputy Minister of Agriculture Irrigation and Water Development

be working effectively, and different options need to be explored to widen and deepen engagement (see below).

b) Deepen the partnership's focus on strengthening country processes

Those who are aware of SWA's increasing focus on strengthening the WASH sector's enabling environment and catalysing improvements in development effectiveness have welcomed these shifts, and those who are unaware are nonetheless looking for the partnership to contribute more in this area. In particular, stakeholders are looking for ways to strengthen the way the sector operates in terms of core systems such as finance and monitoring.

However, whilst there is a consensus that international pressure through SWA for increased focus on system strengthening, and support from SWA on how Malawi can strengthen its national systems, represent the most valuable contributions the partnership could make at country level, it is also clear that this is not yet happening. In order to move forward more effectively, stakeholders encourage SWA to ensure 'strengthening country processes' is the central starting point of all SWA activities and decisions, rather than an afterthought or secondary principle.

c) Prioritise alignment with existing country mechanisms and processes

Ensuring more effective alignment between SWA's country engagement and existing country processes and mechanisms should be the keystone of efforts to deepen SWA's focus on strengthening country processes. Indeed, without addressing the ongoing failure to successfully link SWA engagement with national process and systems, the impact and effectiveness of the partnership will remain limited.

The question of how to truly strengthen existing policy dialogue at country level and align to existing national and local plans is seen as the central challenge for SWA, but also the only way for SWA to make tangible progress. The status quo of parallel structures and separate meetings is widely seen as unhelpful; instead SWA needs to be seen as an ongoing tool embedded into the work of fora such as the SWG. To truly align with – and strengthen – country processes, variations in country timelines also need to be accommodated, with SWA engagement structured in a way that prioritises strengthening and use of national cycles of planning, monitoring and review, rather than the imperative of responding and reporting to external global forces. 'Quick fire' processes that require action over a couple of months will always be very difficult to align.

Whilst this carries significant challenges to aspects of SWA's current ways of working, it has the potential to deliver a step change in the effectiveness of the partnership. By taking advantage of existing structures within the sector, and utilising SWA as an opportunity and build a "global voice" into existing systems, SWA can ensure its efforts to strengthening country processes move from lip service to reality. For example, there is an urgent need to ensure SWA engagement strengthens the Malawi WASH sector's mobilisation around key funding windows (such as the development of the new five-year strategy MGDS, or annual budget ceiling discussions) rather than distracting focus away from these national processes and discussions. Embedding SWA within forums such as the SWG which already has the participation of key stakeholders, such as bilateral donors, that are absent from SWA

discussions will also help address the “exclusive” nature of current SWA engagement.

d) Broaden and deepen engagement among existing partners

The fact that WASH stakeholders in Malawi see SWA as only targeting a limited number of partners is damaging to the partnership’s effectiveness and its reputation as a multi-stakeholder platform. It is clear that SWA needs to do more to bring on board stakeholders who risk getting left behind, both within government and – crucially – across SWA’s other constituencies. This is particularly important for a country like Malawi, which can only achieve the SDGs with the support of DPs.

Within government

Continued efforts to strengthen government leadership of SWA will help ensure the partnership is not perceived as “a UNICEF thing or a WaterAid thing”. In addition, there is a need for SWA to explore ways to broaden its engagement with country governments, beyond individual focal points and occasional interaction with key ministers.

In particular, SWA should look beyond ministers to strengthen its engagement with the technical teams that provide key support and are ultimately responsible for follow-up and delivery of any decisions or commitments delivered by ministers. Senior technical staff – and especially Principle Secretaries – are a powerful and important force in the WASH sector, particularly in the context of the regular ministerial changes that have characterised Malawi’s WASH sector over recent years. PSs can stay for years, and have the capacity to drive the ministry and sustain interventions in a way that makes their support essential for any sector “breakthrough”. There was considerable excitement among stakeholders around “the kind of conversation you could have if you brought these people together”, but there was also a feeling that to date their power has not been recognised by SWA. Whilst there may be potential for continued high level engagement with ministers, SWA should explore ways to better balance this with greater engagement with other key government stakeholders.

Among development partners

At the moment multilateral and bilateral donors and development banks are noticeable by their absence from SWA engagement in Malawi. There is an urgent need for DPs to internalise SWA and engage at country level, particularly when it comes to identifying the remedial reforms and behaviour changes needed on all sides to help Malawi deliver the SDGs. Without this, government confidence that SWA provides a useful avenue for finding a common way forward will continue to erode.

“My biggest recommendation for SWA is not to assume DPs will pick it up. Go out and catalyse them, so they will come in and support.”

It is clear that such engagement will not be achieved without active effort. More needs to be done to ensure global SWA communications are targeted at development partners, that DPs understand the substantive role expected of them, and that they are

aware of key tools such as the Collaborate Behaviours. Individual SWA partners also need to take steps to ensure their headquarters are entering into dialogue with country offices around the importance of engaging in SWA.

Among NGOs

To date, SWA has emphasised the role of civil society organisations as the voice of the marginalised, and as “watchdogs” of government progress towards sanitation and water for all.

“We [CSOs] need to do what we want them [government] to do. We need to be transparent too. We are not setting a good example.”

However, it is also important to recognise that in countries like Malawi many NGOs are also acting as implementing partners involved in delivery of WASH services, and as such need to be held accountable for their behaviours in the same way as other sector partners. SWA should work with organisations such as WESNET to explore ways to foster improvements in coordination and alignment among its NGO partners.

e) Strengthening mutual accountability

The multi-stakeholder nature of SWA, and thus its potential to provide a platform for strengthened mutual accountability, is recognised as part of the partnership’s “unique selling point”, and both government and DP stakeholders in Malawi are keen to see SWA pushing partners to make this a reality. In particular partners emphasised the need for a robust accountability framework around the Collaborative Behaviours, to allow the sector to move beyond “everyone using the right words... but continuing to use practices that are compromising the sustainability of the sector”.

“We are always quick to sign agreements, but when it comes to implementation we still have challenges. Only way to achieve is if there is accountability – in country and at other levels”

Extending the focus beyond one route of implementation (i.e. government) to track progress made by the sector as a whole, and allocation of actions across all constituencies, could help SWA tackle the limited participation of some constituencies to date. A strengthened focus on fostering mutual

accountability would also serve to make SWA engagement more palatable to government, by building confidence that efforts would lead to a reciprocal response from development partners that goes beyond “high level socialising”.

To maximise its impact, SWA’s mutual accountability mechanism should start from discussions at a national level, rather than creating an isolated process at international level. In particular, SWA should link to JSRs and sector review processes to ensure global discussions will be based on evidence from the ground, adding an element of “global peer pressure” to highlight those that are – and are not – making progress against their own national targets and undertakings.

f) Continue to promote tools such as the Collaborative Behaviours and Building Blocks, but allow scope for flexibility and interpretation

As outlined above, the means to address weakness in sector systems and institutions are seen as “the crux of what [Malawi’s WASH] sector is lacking”. The SWA Collaborative Behaviours and Building Blocks are seen as valuable tools that create an opportunity for analytical work, dialogue and feedback, giving the sector space to reflect on its own processes (such as the SWAp and JSR) in a way that is not otherwise happening.

Whilst the terminology of Behaviours and Building Blocks is new, the areas of analysis they summarise are not, and they are seen as complementing existing efforts, rather than starting a new conversation. For this reason, the value of these tools is in the global framing they provide, rather than in the detail or specifics; what they look like will be different in every country, and SWA is encouraged to focus on capturing high level ideas rather than “getting into the nitty gritty”. In particular stakeholders emphasised the need to focus on identifying key functions and sharing practical information for those who are on board with the concepts but looking for ways to translate these to change on the ground, rather than dictating forms or focusing too much on “using the right language and saying the right things” without practical follow-through.

g) Explore ways to channel technical support

Whilst partners in Malawi recognise that SWA is not a funding body, the lack of financial support linked to SWA nonetheless creates a challenge for the partnership. This has been compounded to date by the lack of indication that government engagement in SWA would be met by a reciprocal response from financing or technical partners (despite the principle of ‘joint action’ on which the partnership was built). Instead SWA has gained an unfortunate reputation for empty promises, and preaching principles that it does not actually support stakeholders at country level to put into practice.

SWA therefore needs to explore ways to ensure a clearer and more direct response to needs and challenges raised through engagement in the partnership, ensuring the implied support to government from donors and other partners is realised in practice, and that the support made available during the HLPWD does not suddenly disappear after HLMs. Suggestions included mobilising support and expertise to build capacity at country level in particular areas – such as monitoring and evaluation – or focusing on particular countries (identified through an assessment or ranking) for intensive support to catalyse progress. Whilst such activities would still be delivered through existing partners, by taking place under the umbrella of SWA they could secure wider ownership and buy-in. The importance of this last point – the ability of SWA to catalyse work that is not owned by only one organisation – was repeatedly reiterated, with partners stressing the importance of packing SWA engagement in a way that it goes above DP politics is not construed as the agenda of any one partner.

7. Recommendations for strengthening SWA engagement in Malawi

Whilst the above recommendations are directed at the global SWA partnership as a whole, this case study also highlights a number of key recommendations for partners in Malawi.¹⁹

a) Use SWA to drive in-country processes

SWA provides a valuable means through which to catalyse support around key in-country processes and opportunities in which the WASH sector has traditionally had only weak engagement. For example, the SWA High Level Political Dialogue process could be utilised as an opportunity to harness global discussions about SDG readiness and the steps needed to deliver on Malawi's water and sanitation commitments and link these to link preparation of the MGDSIII. Likewise, SWA tools such as the Building Blocks could be used to identify key reform areas and push for these to be incorporated into annual planning.

This kind of impact will not be achieved as long as Malawi continues to view SWA as an isolated process. Instead, SWA should be seen as a complementary force that can be used to inform and strengthen other processes. Taking ownership of SWA engagement by mapping out a cycle of how and when the opportunities and tools it provides can add most value (rather than waiting for this to be dictated by external forces), will allow partners in Malawi to ensure engagement with the partnership reduces – rather than exacerbates – current inefficiencies in sector processes.

b) Mainstream SWA into SWG

A key step toward utilising SWA to drive in-country processes will be the mainstreaming of SWA discussions under the SWG. Whilst an SWA Task Force may still be useful to take forward specific activities, ownership of Malawi's engagement in SWA needs to sit with the sector as a whole. The Sector Working Group not only provides a means through which to broaden country engagement in SWA through a membership that includes Principle Secretaries, directors, and DPs, but also to ensure any milestones or actions identified through SWA are aligned with broader sector planning and review taking place through the JSR. However, given the current challenges that are being faced by the SWG and the relative infrequency with which it meets, careful consideration will need to be given to how to integrate these processes.

c) Encourage strengthened SWA engagement by all sector partners

In addition to global efforts to broaden and deepen engagement across SWA's constituencies, partners in Malawi – particularly those who already actively engaged in SWA – can play a crucial role in broadening the number of actors who are aware of, and involved in, SWA activities in Malawi. This could include using SWG meetings or other opportunities for development partners to share specific examples of best practices in taking up and applying the SWA framework through their work at country level.

¹⁹ The recommendation in this section focus specifically on Malawi's relationship with SWA, rather than duplicating broader recommendations for sector as a whole that have already well captured through other studies.

d) Use the neutrality of SWA to rise above sector politics

By providing a common umbrella under which partners can unite, SWA offers a way to navigate some of the challenges that can undermine collaboration within the sector. This could include circumventing competition among NGOs, providing a package for activities that is not “owned” by any one DP, or providing a neutral space to reflect critically on the bottlenecks preventing progress towards a SWAp.

e) Strengthen WESNET

There is widespread recognition and appreciation of the role played by WESNET, and the burden of expectation and responsibility placed on the network is ever growing. However, at the moment this does not seem to be translating into resources. DPs are encouraged to increase support for WESNET, both through direct financial support, and by requiring their NGO partners to subscribe and report to WESNET.

Civil society engagement in SWA in Malawi could also be strengthened by making WESNET the national SWA focal point for civil society. At the moment this role is held by an organisation that is not a WESNET member nor plugged into the sector through other channels, and this reduces the ability of CSOs stay informed and actively participating in SWA activities.

f) Bring the Ministry of Finance back into sector discussions

There is a lot that could be done to strengthen the sector’s relationship with MoF, particularly by ensuring a stronger sector voice in annual and multi-year budget processes, with lobbying based on solid programme proposals that reflect the core mandate of the ministry and are aligned with strategic priorities. Encouraging representatives of MoF to re-engage with sector discussions through fora such as the JSR would also help ensure commitments catalysed by processes like SWA have the support of treasury and are included in necessary budgets.

Further analysis of the reasons behind the recent decline in budget commitments for WASH could also help ensure mobilisation and advocacy catalysed by SWA is effectively and strategically targeted.

g) Use the JSR as a dynamo for sector progress

Ensuring the JSR fulfils its potential as a driver of sector reform will be key to maximising the effectiveness not only of SWA engagement but of all activities in Malawi’s WASH sector. Government and partners should take time to review and reach consensus on the objectives of the JSR, and agree clear steps to strengthen the processes and ensure these objectives are achieved. Key characteristics of the process should include:

- Comprehensive analysis of the sector as a whole, based on submissions of plans and reports from all partners.
- Critical reflection on sector issues and identification of solutions, rather than just reciting challenges without unpacking.
- Links to any international commitments against which the sector is required to report.

8. Conclusion

Whilst SWA has brought recognisable benefits to Malawi's WASH sector – most noticeably in catalysing WASH policy dialogue and providing a framework for discussion of sector weaknesses and blockages – it is clear that SWA is not yet achieving its ambition to catalyse the step change in sector progress needed to achieve water, sanitation and hygiene for all.

To fulfil its potential, SWA must re-orient activities to ensure its commitment to 'strengthening country processes' is operationalised. This means ensuring country processes and systems are the centre of SWA engagement, with the partnership's global activities aligned with, and acting to strengthen, country level process. In particular, it requires SWA to urgently work to strengthen links between the SWA accountability mechanism and country processes for planning, monitoring and review, and to ensure accountability initiatives at global and regional levels support and strengthen country-level accountability.

Malawi's experience also highlights the importance of continuing to deepen SWA's focus on strengthening sector building blocks and promoting the Collaborative Behaviours, utilising the global and regional reach of the partnership to provide a platform for discussion of the challenges faced in developing a functioning WASH sector and identification of the reforms needed to overcome these bottlenecks.

To support these efforts, SWA must also strengthen and broaden its engagement strategy to focus on a wider audience, ensuring there is ownership, active involvement, and accountability across all constituencies. Without the awareness and buy-in of both government and development partners at both global and country levels, SWA's ambition of strengthening country processes towards sanitation, hygiene and water for all, always and forever will remain out of reach.

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Annex 1: List of Interviewees

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2. Takeshi Higo
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3. Vera N'goma
Team Leader, Human Development Team, DFID
4. Elia Chimulambe
Preventative Health Programme Manager / WASH Advisor, DFID
5. Blessius Tauzie
WASH Specialist, unicef Malawi
6. Paulos Workneh
Chief of WASH, unicef Malawi
7. Emma M. Mbalame
Deputy Director Water Supply Services, MoAIWD
8. Mr. Thanasius Sitolo
MoAIWD
9. Sydney Byrns
Program Director, Engineers Without borders / WASH Catalysts Malawi
10. Gift D. Sageme
Chief Executive Office, Central Region Water Board
11. Josses Mugabi
Senior Water & Sanitation Specialist, The World Bank
12. Maclenan Guy Nyang'wa
Director of Technical Services, Lilongwe Water Board
13. Dr Storn Kabuluzi,
Director of Preventative Health Services, Ministry of Health
14. Dr Charles C.V. Mwansambo
Chief of Health Services, Ministry of Health
15. Tiyese Zumu-Mwale
Country Director, PumpAid
16. Benson Bumbe Nkhoma
Principle Water & Sanitation Specialist, African Development Bank
17. George Chande
Deputy Director of Planning, Department of Irrigation and Water development,
MoAIWD
18. Chrispin Bokho
Water and Environmental Sanitation Network
19. Goodluck Chaphulika
MoAIWD Desk Officer, Ministry of Finance
20. Ngabaghila Chatata
WSSCC
21. Lucy Mungoni
USAID Malawi
22. Kate Harawa
Country Director, Water for People
23. Moses Aaron Zuze
Ministry of Local Government

24. Masauko A. Mthunzi
Global WASH Expert, United Purpose
25. Vitto P.V. Mulula
Director of Health and Social Welfare Services, Lilongwe City Council
26. Edward Joshua
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27. Annie Msosa
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