

From data to decisions: how to promote evidence-based decision making through external investments in country-led monitoring processes?

Background and Rationale

As systems approaches become more prevalent within the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector, a greater number of stakeholders are concentrating efforts on strengthening 'sector building blocks'ⁱ. The development of these approaches comes from a recognition that sustainable WASH services cannot be delivered through infrastructure alone, but must be supported by investments in areas such as planning, budgeting, monitoring, and coordination.

This shift in thinking has led many development partners to engage with - and invest in - country-led monitoring processes. In part, this reflects an appreciation of the fact that effective sector monitoring often plays a central role in catalysing WASH progressⁱⁱ. Investments in monitoring are also motivated by the ambition of SDG 6, as tracking progress toward the global targets at a national level usually requires more data to be collected on service levels and the equity of service delivery. This task is challenging for many low- and middle-income countries in the absence of external support. In addition, advances in ICT-based monitoring further incentivise engagement in this area, as these systems are often seen as a tangible and attractive investment option for development partners.

While there is a long history of attempts by external development agencies to strengthen monitoring within the WASH sector, this has not always been matched by progress in the use of data for decision-makingⁱⁱⁱ. Common challenges have included: projectized or short-term approaches; fragmentation and lack of coordination between governments and development partners; lack of demand from decision-makers for regular data; weak institutionalisation of monitoring processes; undefined roles and responsibilities; lack of trained staff; and the lack of resources to update data and to respond to the issues that are identified.

The challenge of promoting the use of data for decision making is not unique to the WASH sector. In a recent evaluation of support for data and statistical capacity, the World Bank noted that their interventions in this area have had limited success in promoting the use of data by decision makers or citizens^{iv}. This evaluation also stressed the need to draw on insights from behavioural sciences to better understand motivations and create a more 'user-centred data culture'.

This points to a knowledge gap that exists in the WASH sector: how should development partners engage with country-led monitoring processes to promote the use of data for decision-making? Addressing this knowledge gap requires that attention be paid to the political economy of decision-making – that is, the institutions, incentives, and ideas that shape the behaviour of key decision makers.

Objectives

This work forms part of WaterAid's wider efforts to understand how external development agencies can best support the strengthening of national WASH systems.

Specifically, this research will aim to:

1. Place discussions about the monitoring of WASH service levels within the wider discourse on evidence-based / evidence-informed decision making.
 - a. Review contemporary literature on evidence-based decision making from a political economy and/or behavioural sciences perspective.
 - b. Develop an analytical framework which can be used to critically analyse WASH monitoring processes from these perspectives.
2. Analyse current practice in the global WASH sector.
 - a. Identify 3 case studies of national WASH monitoring systems that have been developed with significant external support, and analyse their impact on decision making using the framework developed in 1.b.
3. Make recommendations for governments and development partners as to how external support to country-led monitoring of WASH service levels can be harnessed to strengthen the use of data by key decision makers.

Methodology

A detailed methodology will be defined by the consultant(s) in collaboration with WaterAid. It is expected that the study will be conducted in two phases.

Phase 1:

- A literature review to address Objectives 1.a. and 1.b.
- Questions to be addressed:
 - o What do contemporary debates within political economy and/or behavioural science tell us about evidence-based decision making?
 - o Specifically, what insights does this literature provide on how institutions, incentives, and ideas shape how data is used for decision making?
 - o What analytical framework would best enable an assessment of WASH service level monitoring from these perspectives?

Phase 2:

- Three case studies to address Objectives 2 and 3.
- Primarily desk based, but should include telephone/Skype interviews with key informants.
- Questions to be addressed:
 - o How are development partners delivering support to country-led monitoring of WASH service levels?
 - o How does this support engage with the challenges associated with the use of data for decision making?
 - o To what extent do existing efforts reflect what is known about evidence-based decision making from a political economy and/or behavioural science perspective?
 - o What are the bottlenecks at different levels of decision-making (e.g. service provider, service authority, regulator, policy), which impede the use of data?
 - o What do governments and development partners need to do to overcome these bottlenecks and stimulate the use of data by decision-makers?

Outputs

1. Review of literature on evidence-based decision making and development of analytical framework (8-10 pages – for internal WaterAid use).
2. Synthesis report of case studies and recommendations (25-30 pages – for external publication).

Intended Audience:

The main targets of this research will be development partners (particularly UN agencies and bilateral donors), national governments receiving external WASH funding, and global and regional initiatives focused on sector performance (such as Sanitation and Water for All).

We expect the work to be shared with WASH sector stakeholders through a variety of meetings and events from autumn 2019 onwards.

Budget:

The total budget available for this work is approximately £35k, including VAT.

Indicative Timeline:

2 nd Jan – 30 th Jan 2019	Request for proposals
Early February 2019	Identification of consultants
End February 2019	Confirmation of methodology
End March 2019	Literature review – first draft submitted Identification of case studies
Early April 2019	Literature review – final draft submitted
Early May 2019	Synthesis report - first draft shared for comment
End May 2019	Synthesis report - final report submitted

Application process:

Consultants are requested to submit applications briefly outlining your organisation, relevant experience and expertise, and suitability for this work (plus CVs in appendix).

Applications should be sent to stuartkempster@wateraid.org, with email subject “Proposal: From data to decisions”, by no later than **30th January 2019**.

ⁱ For example, Sanitation and Water for All Building Blocks, <http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/priority-areas/building-blocks/>

ⁱⁱ Northover et al (2016) [Achieving Total Sanitation and Hygiene Coverage within a Generation—Lessons from East Asia](#). WaterAid, London.

Mason et al (2016) [Beyond Political Commitment to Sanitation: Navigating Incentives for Prioritisation and Course Correction in Ethiopia, India and Indonesia](#). WaterAid, London.

ⁱⁱⁱ WaterAid (2018) [UNC Session Summary: supporting district and national monitoring and review systems](#). WaterAid, London.

^{iv} World Bank (2018) [Data for Development: An Evaluation of World Bank Support for Data and Statistical Capacity](#). Independent Evaluation Group, Washington, DC: World Bank.