Watershed
empowering citizens

Monitoring civil society advocacy: a guide for the water sector

IRC Supporting water sanitation and hygiene services for life
Simavi
Wetlands International
Akvo.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Monitoring civil society advocacy: a guide for the water sector

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Abbreviations

CSO	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION
CAP	CAPACITY ACTION PLAN
CSA	CAPACITY SELF-ASSESSMENT
DGIS	DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS)
OH	OUTCOME HARVESTING
PMEL	PLANNING MONITORING EVALUATION & LEARNING
QIS	QUALITATIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM LADDERS
TOC	THEORY OF CHANGE
WASH	WATER SANITATION AND HYGIENE
WP	WORK PACKAGE

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Executive summary

Watershed was essentially a civil society capacity strengthening programme that focused on lobby and advocacy in the water sector. The questions regarding the planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) processes that emerged during the design phase were:

"What are we going to track in this large programme, how? And what are the most useful tools that are used not only for monitoring but also for learning?"

The PMEL processes within Watershed have strived to be as adaptive, inclusive and reflective as possible. The tools used have seen many changes and adaptations throughout the Watershed life cycle in order to meet the needs of both the users and the programme.

Since the inception phase, four primary tools have been used to monitor progress and learning: theories of change (ToCs), capacity self-assessments (CSAs) and capacity action plans (CAPs), qualitative information system ladders (QIS) and outcome harvesting. How these tools were used was adapted and refined throughout the programme.

Individual country ToCs were used to guide the programme implementation and were reviewed and updated annually to fit the specifics of each target country. CSAs and CAPs acted as self-reflective capacity monitoring tools that facilitated critical self-reflection and discussion that informed the changes to the ToCs and set annual learning agendas at the programme and partner level. QIS ladders were used to quantify qualitative information related to the CSAs but were later dropped and replaced by dialogue and dissent indicators set by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) and outcome harvesting. Outcome harvesting was a reflective monitoring process that also proved useful in the evaluation phase of the programme.

The results of Watershed's achievements that were demonstrated through the PMEL tools were impressive. All the implementing partners increased their capacity in evidence-based lobbying and advocacy. There were also 512 harvested outcomes achieved and the programme has observed 70 laws, policies and norms that have been implemented for sustainable and inclusive development.

1. Introduction

Watershed Empowering Citizens is a strategic partnership of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS), IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo. The five-year programme (2016-2020) aimed to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to influence policy and achieve SDG 6 in Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali and Uganda. Additional lobbying and advocacy strategies closely connected to the issues in the six countries were developed and implemented in the Netherlands and at the international level. The country teams are referred to throughout the programme and this document as work packages (WPs).

The long-term objective of the Watershed programme was to improve governance of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and integrated water resources management (IWRM), so that sustainable services can be accessed by all citizens including the most marginalised. The more immediate goal was to strengthen the capacity of civil society in programme countries to advocate for change, and in particular civil society's ability to access and process relevant information so that their lobbying and advocacy activities are founded on reliable and accurate data.

The aim of this paper is to document and critically reflect upon the PMEL processes of the five year programme, so that the lessons learned can be shared with the international development community and the different methodologies can be used to inspire PMEL activities in other large scale, multi country, context specific programmes. Watershed has delivered a robust and useful PMEL process, guidelines and documents that may prove insightful for other organisations and programmes to learn from and/or implement. Links to the PMEL resources can be found in resources section of this document.

The PMEL budget was 700,000 EUR for the five-year programme which was 4% of the entire budget. The global PMEL team was made up of four representatives of the four consortium partners: Akvo, the IRC, Simavi and Wetlands International. Three of the four members were part of the team from the inception of the programme which helped to retain institutional knowledge and learnings. The PMEL lead was also part of the management team and each WP lead in each country was responsible for both PMEL and management of their WP which was critical in bringing together the learning and planning cycles.

2. Inception phase

An inception phase ran from January to September 2016 with the aim of achieving a consensus regarding the key themes and challenges to be addressed under the programme between the Watershed consortium and its five constituent partners. It also allowed time for each WP to undertake context analysis, stakeholder and factor mapping, develop ToCs and monitoring frameworks and prepare the activities for the implementation phase (process and timeline displayed in Figure 1).

The Watershed global PMEL team (consisting of four PMEL experts from the four consortium partners) developed guidelines and supported the different WPs in conducting a contextual analysis, using the findings for actor and factor mapping, and developing a ToC. Taking into consideration the aim of the programme (capacity strengthening of CSOs to influence policy and practice of WASH service delivery), they also set in place a flexible monitoring framework which the WPs could use to identify and regularly monitor outcomes for both learning and accountability purposes.

The global PMEL team further introduced[1] three tools and methodologies to monitor outcomes:

- Organisational capacity self-assessments (CSAs);
- Qualitative information system (QIS) ladders; and
- Outcome harvesting (OH).

2.1 CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Each of the country context analyses were done in order to: 1) identify those who are excluded from access to sustainable WASH services as well as the barriers to their inclusion; 2) assess the policy, practice and policy implementation gaps which contribute to their exclusion; and 3) identify the relevant stakeholders, their capacity, power and influence. The findings of the context analysis were validated in each country through a workshop with participation from strategic and local implementing partners as well as representatives from the WASH sector.

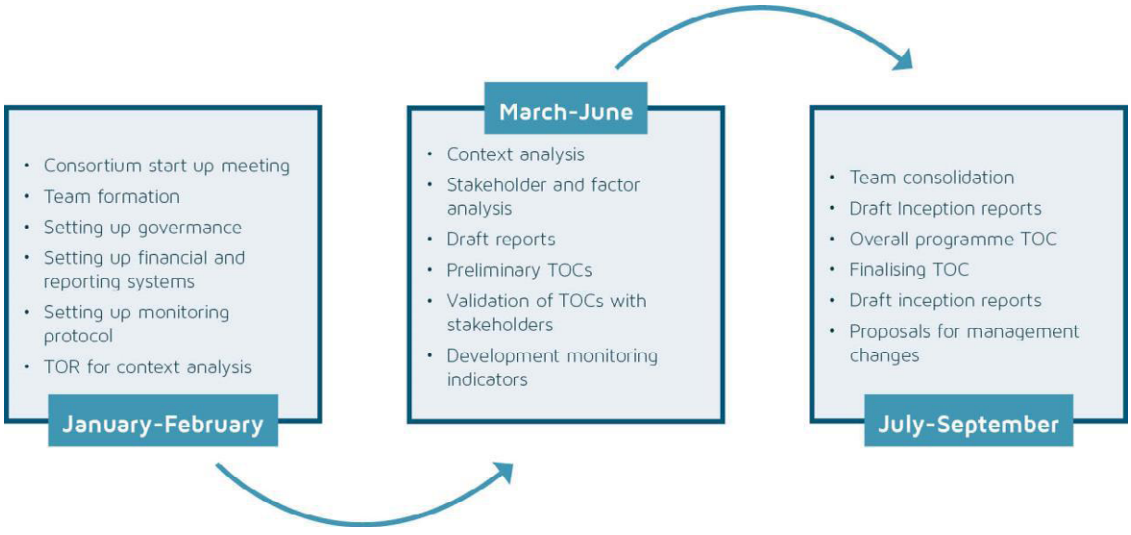


Figure 1: Demonstrating the inception phase process

1 Watershed guidelines for monitoring

2.2 THEORY OF CHANGE

WP level ToC

A ToC was originally created during the development phase of the programme. Following the context analyses conducted as part of the inception phase, the WPs then contributed to the development of the ToC facilitated by the strategic partners. External stakeholders also took part in this process in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana.

The ToCs broadly followed three main strategies: 1) capacity strengthening of CSOs; 2) influencing policy, practice and policy implementation; and 3) inter-stakeholder dialogue (a WP ToC is shown in Figure 2) .

The ToC further elaborated on how the interconnected outcomes intended to contribute to the desired impact, "sustainable WASH for all", and their underlying causal assumptions.

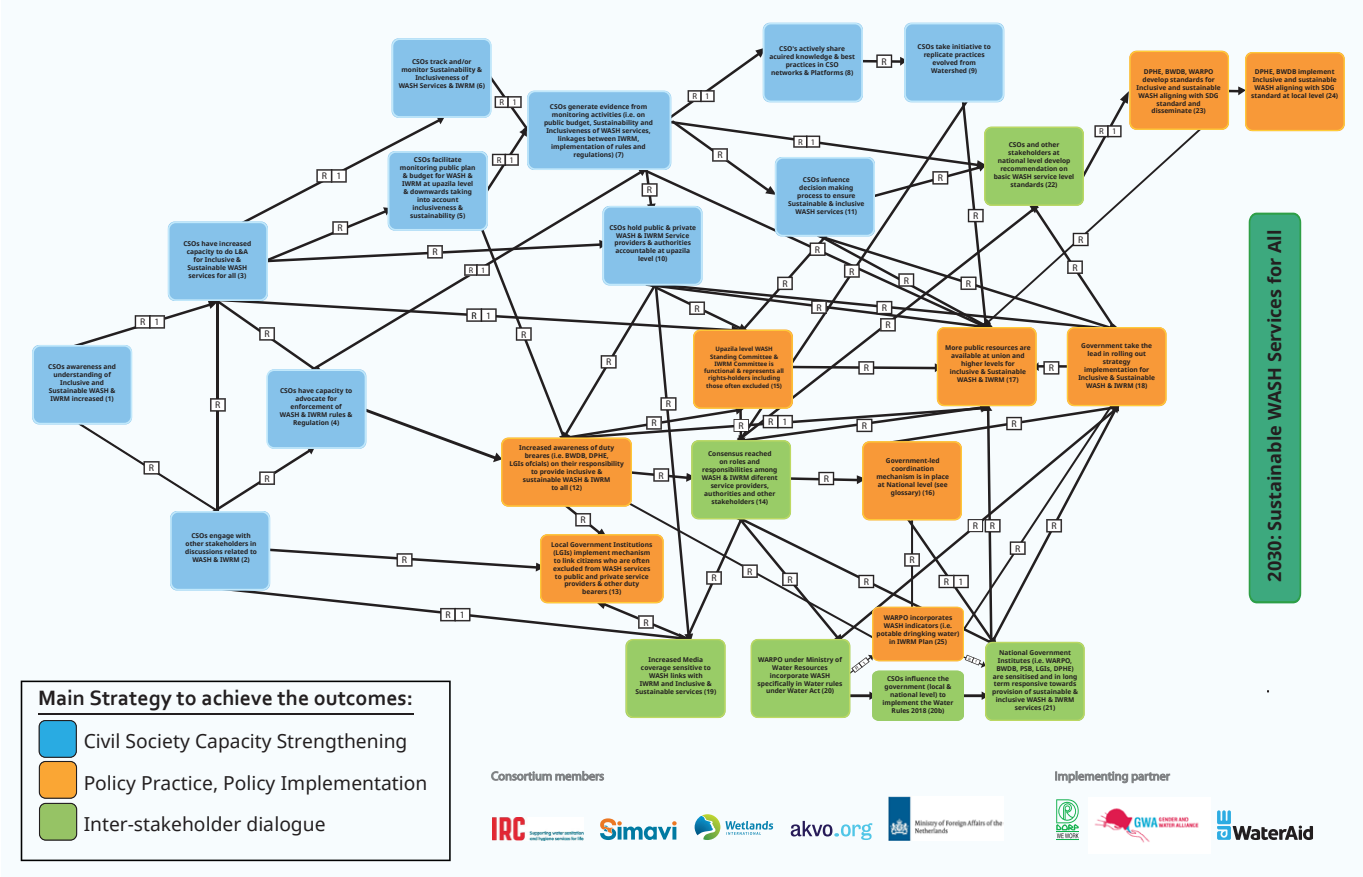


Figure 2: Bangladesh WP ToC, September 2019

Programme level ToC

The global PMEL team took the original ToC as developed for the programme proposal and used all the country ToCs to inform and finalise the overall programme ToC (Figure 3). This made it more concrete, particularly regarding the formulation of the intended outcomes – the changes the programme wanted to see in each individual actor.

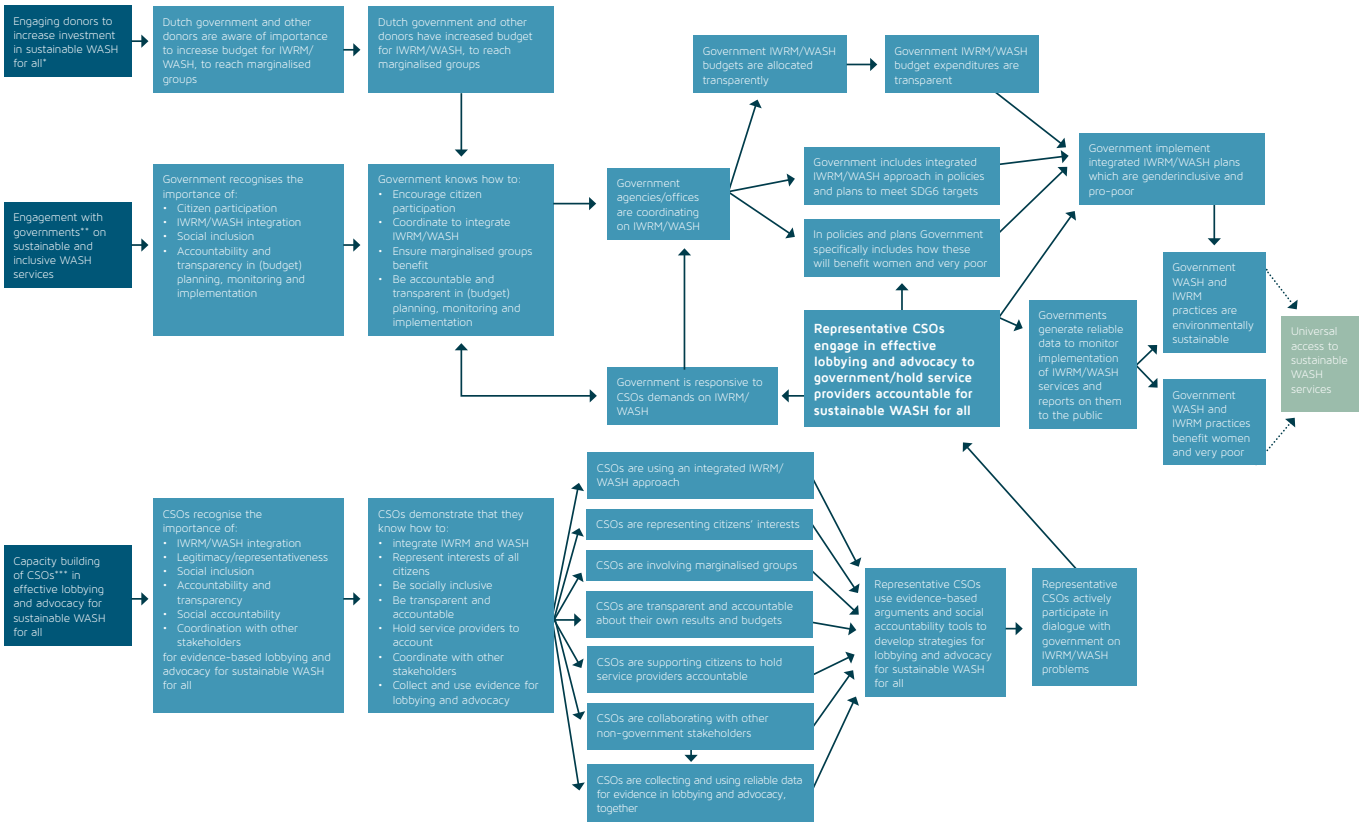


Figure 3: Programme level ToC, September 2019

3. Civil society organisation capacity monitoring

As a capacity development programme focusing on CSOs, it was integral to monitor the capacities of the local implementing partners throughout the programme life cycle.

The principle of the capacity self-assessments (CSAs) and the capacity assessment plans (CAPs) was two-fold. Firstly, it was to track CSOs capacity development over time. Second, and more importantly, it was to encourage regular reflection and learning on the specific capacities that are needed to undergo effective lobby and advocacy, with the ultimate objective to contribute to sustainable and inclusive integrated WASH and IWRM.

3.1 CAPACITY SELF-ASSESSMENTS

Twelve capacity elements were identified based on the programmatic ToC. Elements 4 – 12 are all (apart from one) included in the ToC as intended outcomes. Element 1 was added because it was considered to be important for effective organisation. Elements 2 and 3 were included because they were considered as key for doing advocacy well.

The CSAs and CAPs were completed with all contracted partners as part of an annual monitoring process in which a facilitator asked a set of guiding questions to stimulate reflection and discussion around the chosen 12 capacity elements related to awareness, capacities, skills and the performance of CSOs (as shown in Figure 4).[2]

This encouraged critical self-reflection and discussion around each of the capacity elements. In an Excel document, each implementing partner summarised the main points of discussion (per element) and included a rating per element using a colour-coded system (1-5: from dark red to dark green).

1. Internal organisation	Dedicated governing body, well established accountability system, accounting and HR policies in place, well established monitoring structure.	5 (dark green)
2. L&A strategy	Specific person appointed for a role but an effective strategy needs to be put in place.	2 (orange)
3. Understanding of the stakeholder context	Good understanding of primary and secondary stakeholders, community representation in the governing body.	4 (light green)
4. Legitimacy through representation of constituency	Projects reflect the needs of the situation but legitimacy is still a concern which needs to be addressed.	1 (red)
5. Inclusion of marginalised groups	There is an intent to be inclusive but execution needs improvement.	2 (orange)
6. Level of understanding of sustainability of WASH services	Focus on use and maintenance of facilities but sustainability is a concern.	2 (orange)
7. Integration of IWRM-WASH	Focus on WASH sector, integration not explored.	1 (red)
8. Transparency on own activities and results	Member of Credibility Alliance, transparency is a key element in all activities.	4 (light green)
9. Collaboration with other CSOs for effective L&A	Network for grass-root level implementation but not for L&A.	1 (red)
10. Collaboration with other non-governmental actors for effective L&A	Members of state and national level CSO networks and media platforms.	4 (light green)
11. Level of use of reliable evidence for L&A	Evidence based advocacy but reliability needs to be addressed.	2 (orange)
12. Level of holding service providers to account	Understands the importance of accountability but execution needs improvement.	2 (orange)

Figure 4: CSA table example

2 CSO monitoring guidelines.

The monitoring report of the CSA mentioned one key change per element and described briefly how it was achieved, whether Watershed contributed to it and, if so, how. Finally, the CSO would be asked to record which three capacities would then be prioritised for the following year. The main reflections were then consolidated at the WP level into an Excel monitoring file that would include a brief analysis and interpretation of the partners' CSAs, CAPs and QIS ladders.

3.2 CAPACITY ACTION PLANS

Based on the reflections during the CSA process, implementing partners were required to fill out a CAP for the three prioritised elements of the coming year. The CAP looked at the following factors for each of the prioritised elements:

- The capacity element to work on and description of the current state (taken directly from the CSA);
- Description of desired state, when this will happen and what the CSO will be able to do better when they have developed the capacity;
- An explanation of why it is strategic and relevant to improve on that capacity element;
- A suggestion on how to develop this capacity element through the Watershed programme;
- The likelihood of success of capacity development; and
- What might prevent the success of capacity development.

The CSAs and CAPs were first introduced to the WPs during the inception phase, and in October 2016 the tool was used to set the baseline data for capacity elements per partner. Annually, each implementing partner completed the CSA exercise and prioritised three capacity elements to develop their CAP with the aim of improving those capacities as part of their annual plan.

The reflective nature of the CSA enabled the WPs to zoom in on their abilities and provided a framework to ensure a systematic review on their capacity development. The CSAs for the whole consortium were also analysed every year. This allowed the consortium to identify priorities, particularly related to the Watershed learning trajectories. For example, actions through the programme due to analysis of the CSAs at consortium level led to intensified trainings on social inclusion, the development of advocacy strategies and a focus on improving the understanding of the connection between IWRM and WASH.

3.3 REFLECTION ON CAPACITY SELF-ASSESSMENTS AND ACTION PLANS

Despite all WPs meaningfully completing the CSAs and CAPs each year, the Watershed final evaluation conducted by Pop Dev noted some difficulty in the self-assessment process among partners in half of the countries due to a lack of comprehensive understanding of the tool. They also found that there was a difference in the understanding of

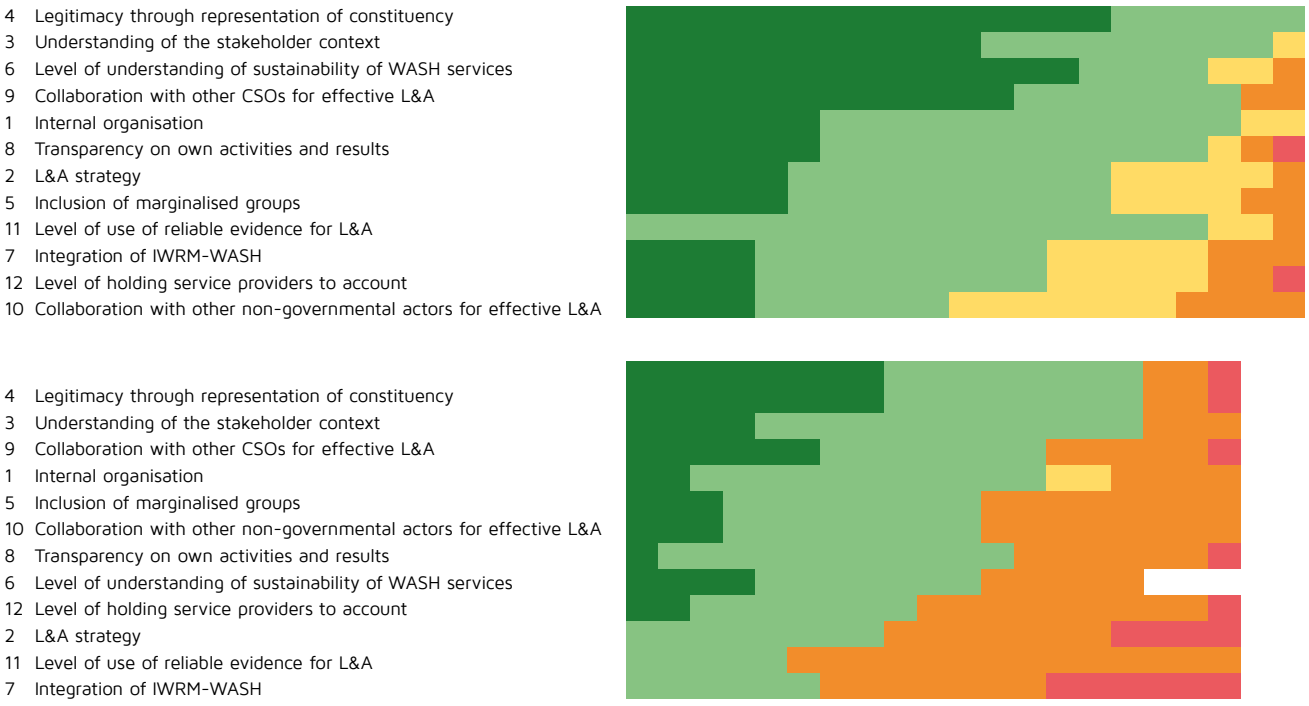


Figure 5: CSA results demonstrating the change in capacities per implementing partner from 2016 (below) to 2019 (above)

the capacity elements both within and between WPs. In some cases, as the CSOs began to learn more about the different topics included in the CSAs, they became more aware of what they also didn't know. This resulted in annual decreases in their capacity scoring while the narrative clearly showed an increase. However, this was not seen as an issue by the global PMEL team as the purpose of the CSA was to provide a framework for the CSOs to reflect on their own capacities, and was not to be used for evaluation or reporting purposes. As such, a decrease in scores over time was acceptable and the objective of the process was to explore what the CSOs were learning and to inform the WPs and consortium which areas of capacity building to focus on. Figure 5 displays the progression of self-reported capacities from 2016 to 2019 which demonstrates an overall positive increase over time.

3.4 QUALITATIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM (QIS) LADDERS

QIS ladders were designed in 2004 to be flexible in the way that they store and analyse qualitative data in order to monitor progress and adaptive management within development programmes. The QIS ladders used in Watershed were originally developed to report on quantified qualitative information to the DGIS.

There were eight generic CSO-level outcomes that made up the QIS ladders, and implementing partners were asked annually to assess their level of capacity per outcome area using ordinal scores from 0-100 representing their level of skill, with each score going up by 25 (as shown in Figure 6) and representing a different option. For example, the options for outcome one were as follows:

QIS ladder: level of use of reliable evidence for L&A	
100%:	CSOs convince their target groups with reliable evidence
75%:	CSOs use reliable evidence on which to base L&A strategies and messages
50%:	CSOs partner with relevant stakeholders to identify and fill gaps in reliable evidence for L&A
25%:	CSOs are aware of the importance of using reliable evidence for L&A
0%:	CSOs are not aware of the importance of using reliable evidence for L&A

Figure 6: QIS ladder levels

The discussions and reflections shared during the CSA facilitation process informed the QIS figures chosen by the WPs. Essentially, the QIS ladders were a way to quantify qualitative data in order to track and report on the progress per outcome area over time.

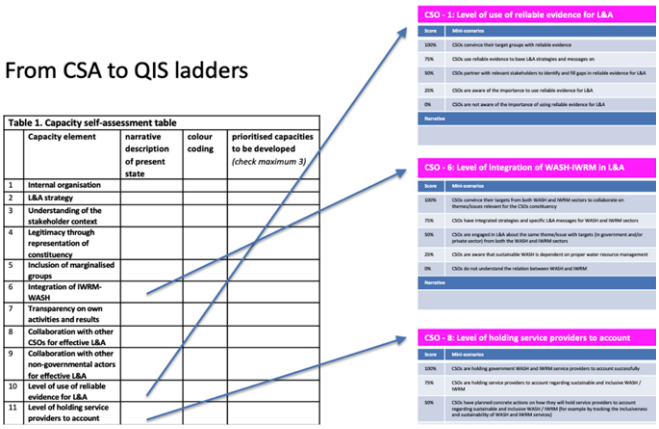


Figure 7: Table demonstrating how CSAs were used to develop the QIS ladder

However, in 2017, six harmonised indicators developed by the DGIS in the course of the Dialogue and Dissent Strategic Partnership Programme were introduced. These six indicators were to be the main source of information for DGIS to aggregate and quantify results of dialogue and dissent programmes. As such, the quantification of results in QIS ladders was no longer needed as a reporting mechanism.

3.5 LIMITATION OF THE QIS LADDERS

Steps in the QIS ladders suggested an upward movement following a fixed sequence of steps. However, it became evident that in reality outcomes do not always follow this logic. There can be outcomes harvested that are examples of a higher step before the lower steps have been achieved (e.g. full awareness). This meant that the way the QIS ladders had been formulated for the Watershed programme was an inaccurate simplification of reality. In addition, the overall progress at the Watershed programme level was not made visible through QIS ladders, as partners selected only three priority elements, meaning that different QIS ladders were chosen per partner, and there was not enough data per QIS ladder to generate meaningful aggregated information.

With the WPs collecting data on the DGIS indicators and outcome harvesting, the QIS ladders were seen as increasingly redundant. To decrease the reporting burden of the WPs, the decision was made to discontinue with QIS ladders from 2018 onwards.

4. Indicators set by the donor

To ensure that Watershed was able to capture the richness of the content of the programme as well as thoroughly understand what changed and how it took place, reporting consisted of both qualitative and quantitative elements.

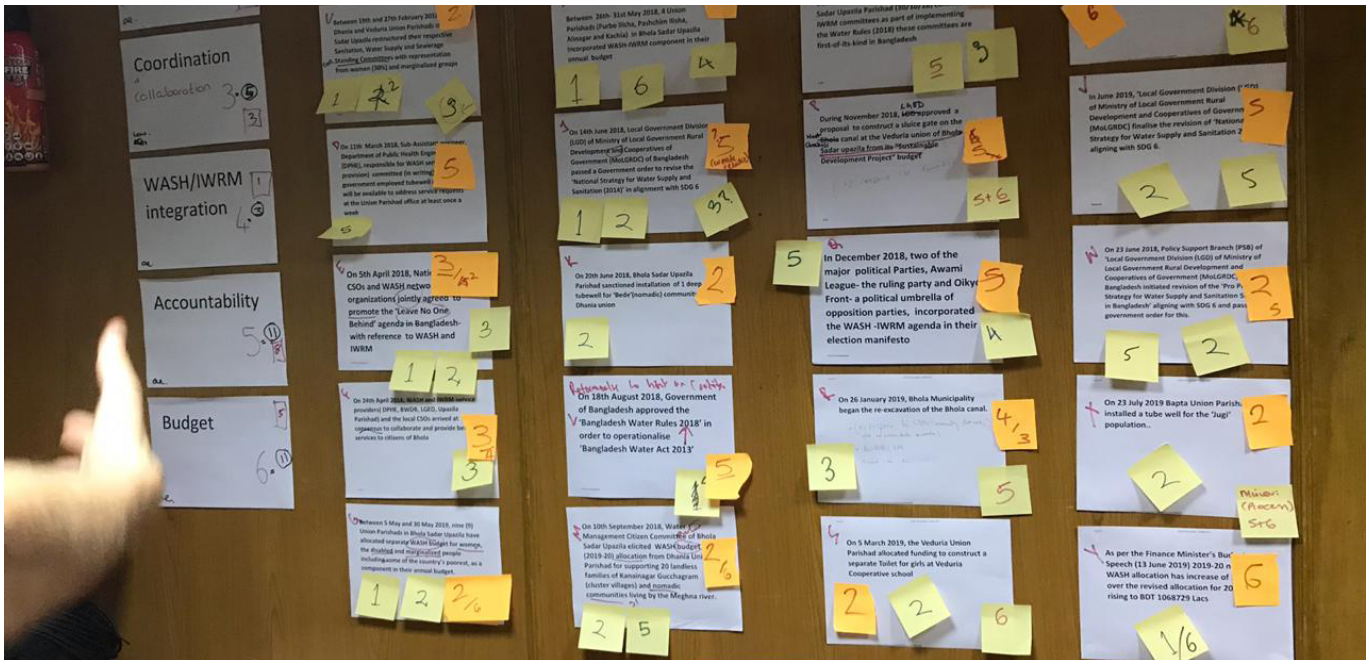
Six harmonised quantitative indicators developed by DGIS in the course of the *Dialogue and Dissent (D&D) Strategic Partnership Programme* were introduced in order to monitor and report on specific areas of the D&D ToC (shown in Figure 8). The indicators were designed in such a way that they captured a broad category of results so that implementing partners could contribute by linking them to their own indicators.

D&D indicators
DD1: # of laws, policies and norms implemented for sustainable and inclusive development
DD2: # of laws, policies and norms/attitudes, blocked, adopted, improved for sustainable and inclusive development
DD3: # of times that CSOs succeeded in creating space for CSO demands and positions through agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or creating space to engage
DD4: # of advocacy initiatives carried out by CSOs, for, by or with their membership/constituency
DD5: # of CSOs with increased L&A capacities
DD6: # of CSOs included in SP's programmes

Figure 8: List of the D&D indicators set by DGIS

The D&D indicators were included in the reporting processes from October 2017 onwards and were designed to be flexible in their use by implementing partners. Partners were under no obligation to copy the exact formulation of the indicators, but instead were encouraged to develop and implement a results framework most suitable for them in order to maximise the PMEL of their specific programme. Essentially, this enabled partners to have specific programme PMEL and indicators in place and use this data to report on the broader centralised indicators, keeping reporting light. Having centralised indicators allowed both the programme and the DGIS to aggregate results and therefore better report on the outreach of all their programmes.

While the broad formulation of the indicators meant that they were easily adaptable to specific projects, it did mean that differences in interpretation were present. For example, in a meeting organised with DGIS in November 2018, it was estimated that only about 50% of CSOs with increased capacities (DD5) were captured, as the real number of CSOs being trained as part of the programmes was unknown.



5. Outcome harvesting

Outcome harvesting was introduced as a pilot in Uganda and Kenya in 2017, then evaluated and gradually extended to the rest of the WPs in 2018. The purpose of outcome harvesting in Watershed was to monitor the programme's outcomes in a participatory manner and, alongside the CSA processes, undergo an analysis of the outcomes in order to enable the WPs to adapt their specific ToCs and inform their annual planning.

Outcomes were defined as changes in the behaviour of external actors who were influenced but not controlled by Watershed. These actors included Watershed contracted partners only when they changed their way of working outside their participation in the Watershed programme. Figure 9 below demonstrates the several layers of change that took place in Watershed and their relation to the different stakeholders.

Each WP was trained in the approach during a two-day hands-on workshop in which the first outcomes were harvested. For each of the WPs, there was a team of people who were responsible for the completion of outcome harvesting, including:

- one harvester per organisation who was individually responsible for identifying and keeping track of outcomes throughout the year;
- the OH coordinator who was responsible for delivering outcomes every year, the content quality of the outcomes and also for the methodological rigour; and
- a representative from the global PMEL team to support in-country staff in the identification, articulation and use of these harvested outcomes.

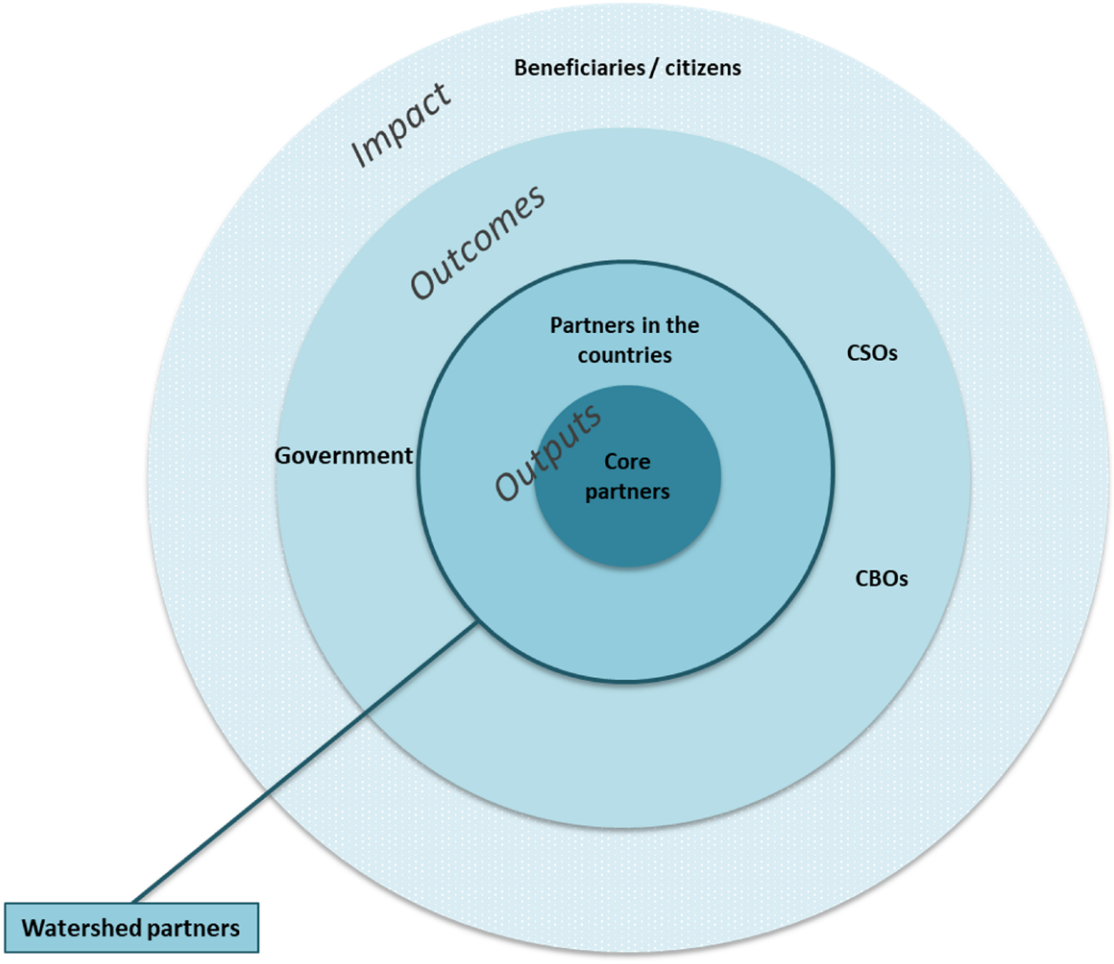


Figure 9: Demonstration of the several layers of Watershed stakeholders

The outcomes were written annually in a Word document per implementing partner (example given in Figure 10) and enriched through a peer review process which took place in a workshop setting. A review of the outcomes known as the "ping-pong" process was conducted between the in-country harvesters, OH coordinators and the global PMEL officer responsible for that WP (the OH team). The ping-pong process ensured that the outcomes were well formulated and articulated.

The fine tuning of outcomes could often be a lengthy process in order to make them sufficiently specific. Facilitating a one-day workshop per WP OH team ensured that together they were able to finalise the outcomes so that they corresponded to what the harvester wanted to capture.

Completing this process with the whole WP created a space where implementing partners were able to share success stories, encouraging horizontal learning as well as opening up the outcomes to the wider group for peer review. This was highly valued by the participants as it allowed them to learn the methodology of OH and about the work and results of their colleagues while also critically reflecting on and fortifying their outcomes.

While many of the participants appeared to appreciate the ping-pong process, such a lengthy procedure could become tedious and result in reduced enthusiasm. As such, it is important to recognise that there may have to be a balance between ensuring the quality of the outcomes is good enough whilst also keeping momentum up.

A study conducted in 2018 to review the outcome harvesting pilot in Uganda and Kenya found that all the respondents (13) considered time spent on outcome harvesting worthwhile, saying it enabled them to learn, critically reflect and could be used for the documentation of progress towards the programme objectives and their contribution to it. Sixty per cent said they had already used the harvested outcomes as a basis for follow up with both government and community level stakeholders, and as a source for annual planning and reporting.

The harvested outcomes were reflected on in both 2018 and 2019 as part of the annual process in a sensemaking workshop.

5.1 SENSEMAKING

The objective of the sensemaking workshops was to facilitate reflection and review the country specific ToC diagrams and causal assumptions using the harvested outcomes. This process was facilitated by a global PMEL officer and the country OH coordinator who was in most cases also the WP lead and therefore had a strong understanding of the ongoing interventions across all partners within their team.

The process of sensemaking was a learning experience that evolved over the programme lifecycle and began in the form of a two-day workshop in 2018 with WPs involved in the OH pilot in Uganda and Kenya. During these workshops, a presentation on the outcome database and

Positive outcomes	Significance of the outcome	Watershed's contribution to the outcome	Sources
In 1–2 sentences please specify **when who** did **what**, and **where**, that potentially or actually represents progress towards environmentally sustainable and equitable governance of WASH and IWRM.	In another 1-2 sentences, please describe **why** the outcome represents progress towards fulfilling Watershed's theory of change.	Again briefly, describe **how** and when your organisation's Watershed activities or outputs influenced the outcome. What did you do that directly or indirectly, in a small to large way, intentionally or not contributed to the change? (Watershed partners who contributed, place name in parentheses)	Either name of person, position and organisation or document who provided the information and date they did so.
On January 26, 2019, Bhola municipality, Bangladesh began the re-excavation of the Bhola canal in response to the IWRM committee's demands.	The canals were inaccessible and filled with water hyacinths and waste which caused regular flooding. The re-excavation led to improved navigation and connectivity and to water availability for domestic purposes (other than drinking) and for extinguishing fires which have been problematic in the area.	DORP (implementing partner) had sensitised CSO representatives who are members of the IWRM committee working to protect water bodies. These members raised the blocking of the canal in the IWRM committee, which in turn raised and advocated for this issue in various meetings with duty bearers at the Union and Upazila (village) level and also to the Bhola municipality. Print and online media published on the issue as well.	Picture Report RSR link *(all links removed)*

Figure 10: Table used for capturing harvested outcomes with an example from the Bangladesh WP

the classification of the outcomes by actor, ToC element and the type of Watershed contribution, as shown in Figure 11, was given. These categories were defined in consultation with the two pilot countries and derived from the ToC.

Type of actor	ToC element	Watershed contribution
National government	Data for Evidence	Training & capacity development
Local government	Social inclusion	L&A
CSO	Coordination & Collaboration	Knowledge Management
Other actor	WASH/IWRM Integration	
	Accountability	
	Budget	

Figure 11: Table used to categorise outcomes in Excel

The workshop aimed to respond to the question:

How do the outcomes confirm and challenge your ToC and what does that mean for the Watershed strategy and implementation plans in the coming 12 months?

Through smaller groups that comprised participants who could bring complementary knowledge and expertise, they were encouraged to discuss this question and then present their findings to the larger group in plenary where their conclusions were documented and taken into consideration for the annual planning. The annual reflection, planning and reporting process in 2018 is shown below:

In 2019 and 2020, prior to the sensemaking sessions, the OH coordinator, in most cases alongside a colleague and the support of a global PMEL officer, completed the categorisation of outcomes as part of a desk review. All the outcomes for the WP were made available in an Excel sheet and were marked by their relevance in the categories mentioned above. Some of the OH coordinators did this process with the entire team, which helped to create ownership over the outcomes as well as making the categorisations more accurate due to the involvement of field staff and their in-depth understanding.

Figure 12: Photo captured in a sensemaking workshop in Dhaka with members of the Bangladesh WP

Sensemaking workshops often took place straight after the peer review workshop in which harvested outcomes were finalised. In 2019 this was conducted after the completion of the CSAs and CAPs in August so that the results of the CSAs and the sensemaking workshop could inform and strengthen their annual planning, a process that took place around the same time, the process is shown in Figure 13.

In 2019, the PMEL global team developed guidelines for the sensemaking sessions facilitated by one of the global PMEL team with the support of the OH coordinator for the workshops conducted with the Bangladesh, India, international, Mali and the Netherlands WPs. In Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, sessions were conducted by the OH coordinator without support from a global PMEL officer.

The script described six exercises that could be completed in the workshop, but allowed the facilitators the freedom to pick and choose those which they deemed to be most important based on their analysis of the harvested outcomes conducted as part of their preparatory analysis.

Similar to the sessions in 2018, the two to three-day workshops involved laying out all the outcomes per ToC element, actor and contribution. The teams were then asked to review their categorisation and discuss why

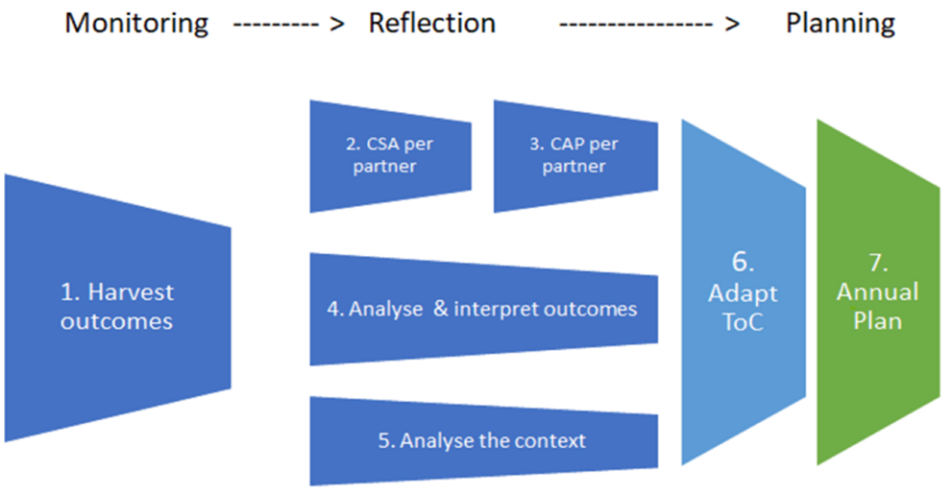


Figure 13: Demonstrates the monitoring process used to inform annual planning

they felt this way. This was best done by printing out the outcomes and sticking them against a large wall (or screen) organised per category and splitting the WPs into smaller groups to discuss certain elements and then present them in plenary. These conversations were captured by a note taker and then reviewed before the ToC review and activity planning to ensure that the insights were used to inform the annual plans.

The WPs then mapped the outcomes to see how they had influenced each other over time. By building causal pathways, the WPs were able to capture a so-called practice of change, the reality of which was compared with the ToC. The causal assumptions were reviewed and the question asked, "do the harvested outcomes confirm or challenge the causal assumptions that underpin our theory of change?" Not only did this exercise help the participants to visualise their progress against the ToC, it enabled them to assess their progress on the specific outcomes as well as their significance in order to achieve the project objectives. As such, the WPs were therefore able to make informed adaptations wherever was necessary for the upcoming year.

"Capturing the smaller changes in actors helped us to capture the entire [change] process."

member from the India WP

The WPs seemed to particularly enjoy this exercise as they felt proud when taking a step back and looking at the changes they had contributed to throughout the duration of the programme. As such, the significance of the outcome harvesting and sensemaking was not only in its ability to undergo adaptive management through informed decision making, but also to provide a moment for the WPs to reflect on their successes, recognise their achievements and celebrate them.

5.2 FINAL SENSEMAKING

A facilitator's script was also produced by the global PMEL team for the final WP sensemaking sessions, which were originally planned to be co-facilitated by the global PMEL officer and OH coordinator of each WP. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the final sensemaking workshops, except Mali, were facilitated online using Zoom and Mural. This meant that the sessions were significantly shorter than had been planned: two-day, in-person meeting with a WP mini team for preliminary analysis, followed by a three-day residential to undergo sensemaking with the wider WP. Instead, both sessions were reduced to two, three-hour meetings online. This impacted the richness of the discussions as well as the number of topics covered. Despite this, almost all the WPs were able to produce pathways of change and make insightful reflections on the programmatic achievements and processes needed to achieve the Watershed objectives. Participants underwent introductory sessions on how to use Zoom and Mural prior to the workshops, which was crucial in ensuring that they were productive.

The process prior to the workshop involved a more rigorous peer review than that in previous years, to ensure all the outcomes were SMART and understandable for an external

reader. Many edits took place on the outcomes captured from 2017 and 2018. The WPs had built their capacity in OH and wished to improve the quality of the outcome formatting.

A deeper preliminary analysis was conducted by a team consisting of a global PMEL officer, OH coordinator and one of the harvesters of that WP. The classification of all the outcomes were reviewed and different links between the strategies and outcomes were looked into. The facilitators picked two or three exercises from the menu of exercises explained in the script (link provided in the resource section).

In the preliminary analysis the outcomes could be further categorised by level of significance (minor, moderate, major) and level of change (initial, transitional, realisation). While rating the outcomes by level of significance, the participants discussed what they found to be more and less significant. One finding was that many of the participants associated a higher level of significance with a higher level of stakeholder. For example, outcomes involving national level government were often depicted as having a greater significance to the programme than those involving local level government. Moreover, the interpretation of this rating varied as different members of the WPs were looking at it through different perspectives, namely from a governance perspective, capacity building perspective and an organisational perspective. This enriched the discussion and ultimately led to an increased joint understanding of the outcomes' significance.

The level of change was helpful for WPs to understand better how their outcomes led into one another and to guide the mapping of the pathways of change. It was found that many of the initial step outcomes from earlier in the programme were not pursued and perhaps the WPs would have benefited by revisiting all the outcomes each year to have ensured better follow up.

Mural worked extremely well as an online facilitating tool, particularly during the pathway mapping exercise where all the members of the WP could move the outcomes about and easily connect them while communicating through Zoom and during the ToC validation exercise. The WPs mapped actual outcomes onto the ToC to show where they stood with respect to the intended outcomes. Personalised touches per WP were completed, for example, Figure 14 shows how colours were used to represent different states on the India WP ToC: yellow for Odisha, red for Bihar and purple for the national level.

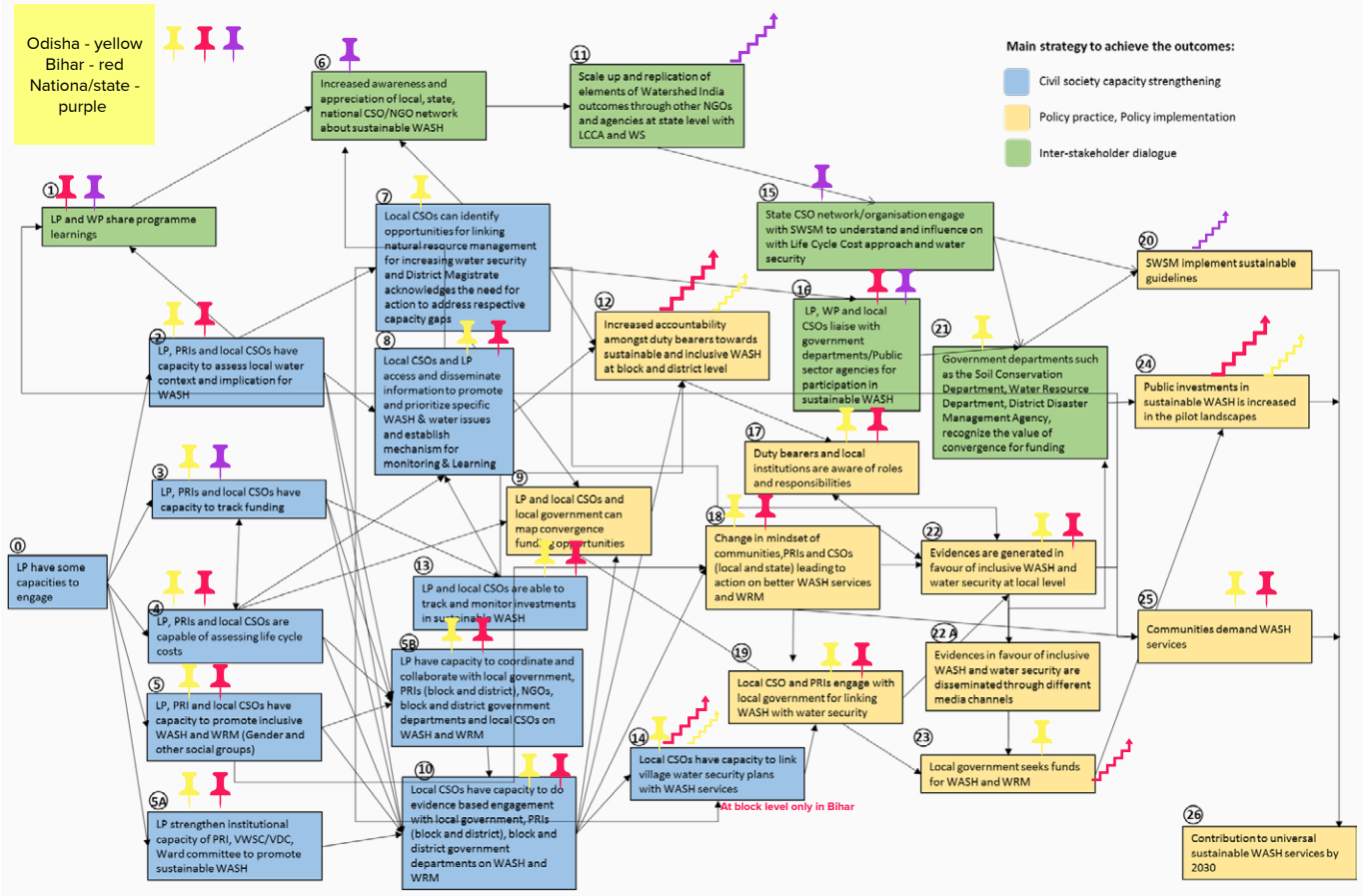
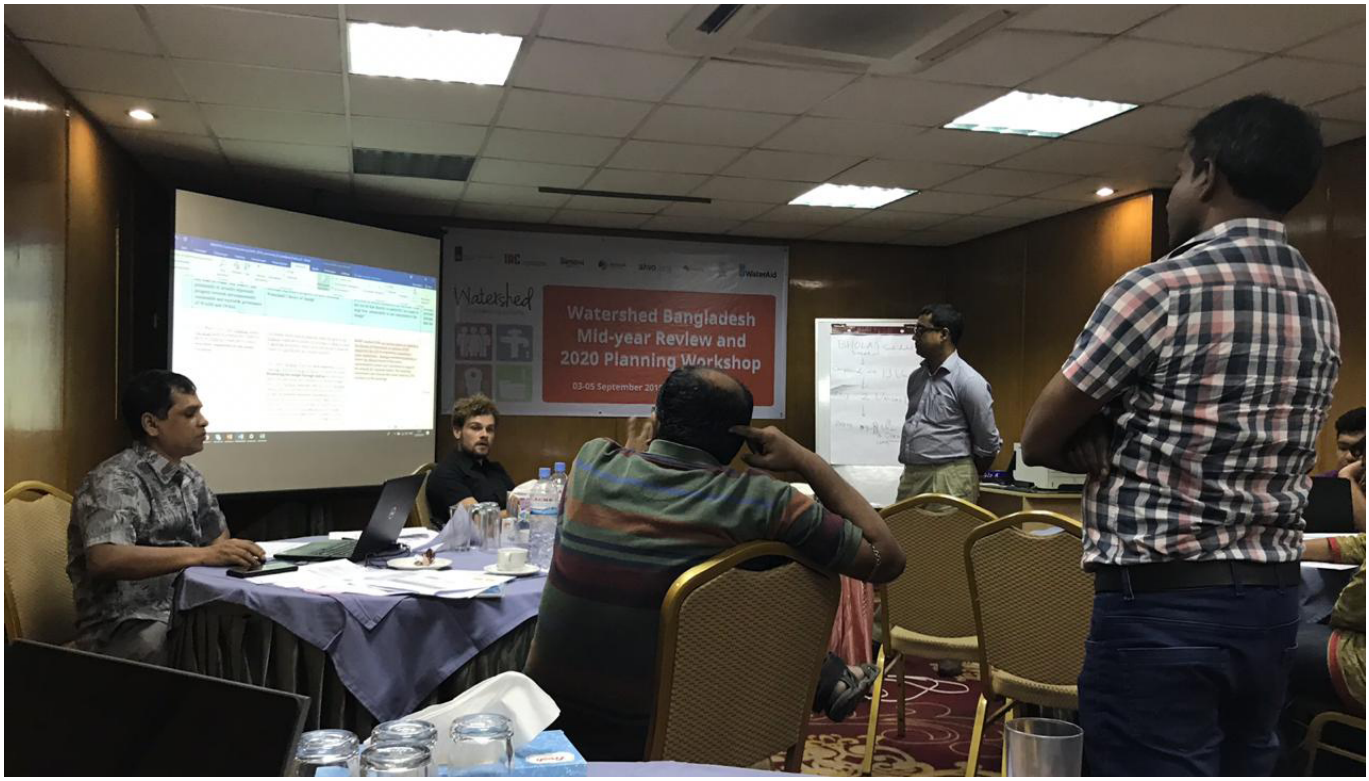


Figure 14: Screenshot taken from a ToC validation conducted through Mural with the India WP in June 2020



The breakout rooms in Zoom also allowed the facilitator to split the WP into smaller groups, allowing for more detailed discussion on the categorisation of outcomes. It was simple to bring the whole group back to plenary to present the main points of their discussion.

5.3 CAPACITY SELF-ASSESSMENTS AGAINST HARVESTED OUTCOMES

Despite a clear link between the CSA elements and the categorisation of harvested outcomes, no significant relation could be made by comparing the two. The distribution of outcomes per categorization (shown in Figure 12) was consistent throughout the years, whereas the ratings per CSA element (as shown in Figure 5) increased for most of the implementing partners and a re-distribution within the order of the scores was observed. The global PMEL team hypothesised that the CSA elements which saw the largest increase in scores would correspond with the number and/or distribution of the related harvested outcomes. However, an analysis conducted at programme level found that a strong correlation did not occur. For example, the greatest self-reported improvement was seen under WASH and IWRM with an average score of 2.25 at baseline and 3.70 in 2019. This was also the greatest percentage of harvested outcomes in both 2017 and 2020, but as the percentage of WASH/IWRM outcomes per year remained rather consistent – from 29% in 2016 to 33% in 2020 – this did not really tell us much about the relationship between the CSO's perception of their capacities and their achievements. To explore this further a deeper analysis should be conducted to thoroughly zoom in on the content of the outcomes and their level of impact or change per ToC element which could then be linked with the CSA scores over time. This would be time consuming and the Watershed team were not able to complete this within the timeframe of the programme.

5.4 REFLECTIONS ON THE OUTCOME HARVESTING PROCESS

The outcome harvesting process changed the way that the partners see programme results. For many, it was the first time they had engaged in advocacy as they were used to reporting on outputs (e.g. the number of toilets constructed). Outcome harvesting pushed participants to think about what actual change can be observed in the stakeholders who they have lobbied and what makes change sustainable. This has been a deep change in mindset and has contributed to the sustainability of the activities completed by the partner organisations.

At the end of the programme, Watershed delivered a total of 473 outcomes, 42% of which were a change at the local government level, 27% at the CSO level, 23% at national government level and 15% by other actors. The ToC element which was most commonly associated with the outcomes was coordination and collaboration of stakeholders (33%), followed closely by WASH/IWRM integration at 32%, accountability 23%, social inclusion 20%, use of data for evidence 18% and finally accountability at 17%. Most of Watershed's contribution was done through training and capacity development (48%), followed by lobbying and advocacy efforts (45%) and less often through knowledge management (15%). In some instances more than one element was a selected per category and as such the total percentages are more than 100%.

6. Lessons learnt & best practices

The PMEL processes of Watershed have been adapted throughout the programme life cycle and many lessons have been learnt. The PMEL has been adapted to be as participatory as possible and to make it easy to feed ongoing monitoring into programme implementation, some of the key learnings and best practices are stated below:

- QIS ladders simplified reality into a linear process that was inaccurate;
- CSAs were extremely useful as a reflection tool by implementing partners as well as to identify areas for capacity development for the upcoming year at both the CSO and consortium level;
- CAPs were helpful in allowing CSOs to focus on where to concentrate their learning efforts each year;
- Harvested outcomes did not capture other actors that contributed towards the change consistently. In order to create more synergies and sustainable change it is important to follow up with these actors. By adding an 'other actor contributions' option to the OH document we would be able to better understand and monitor synergy efforts and as such plan with well targeted allies for their contribution accordingly;
- The sensemaking workshops and CSAs were most effective when facilitated immediately prior to the annual planning. This ensured the WPs fed findings directly into the implementation of the programme for the following year by defining concrete activities as a follow up;
- Sensemaking was not completed consistently throughout all the WPs every year. The role of sensemaking became more clear as the programme progressed and was therefore better established by the end of the programme;
- Having a global PMEL officer to facilitate the sensemaking session took the pressure off the OH coordinator who, as the WP lead, should have a more participatory role in the workshop rather than facilitating it. This was not the case in Ghana, Uganda and Kenya in 2019. However, the Kenya team lead stated that the facilitator's script provided was easy to follow and that the session did go well and the ToC was reviewed;
- Outcome harvesting, including the sensemaking process, has been an effective learning, monitoring and accountability tool. Collecting data for learning and timely decision making has strengthened programme implementation and has been a process which has enabled the WPs to adapt their country specific ToCs and inform their annual planning;
- The outcome harvesting process has proved to be a very effective tool in motivating the WPs as it provides a space for them to reflect upon and visualise the change that the programme has contributed to;
- There is a need to ensure that harvested outcomes are well recorded, so that the process can serve as a resource for evaluation as well as a place to document the successes (and failures) of the programme;
- Having an annual ToC revision enabled WPs to tailor their implementation to the reality on the ground and be adaptable in their management as well as to better understand the process of change versus their theory of how change would happen; and
- Strong links between PMEL and management were crucial to bringing learning and planning cycles together.

Resources

Watershed Capacity Self-Assessment and Capacity Action Plan guidelines (2016)

Watershed outcome harvesting Excel template

Watershed final outcome harvest guidelines (2020)

Watershed guidelines for sensemaking (2019)

Watershed guidelines for sensemaking (2020)

Watershed webinar on outcome harvesting experiences

Watershed webinar on outcome harvesting experiences presentation

Watershed use of outcome harvesting for monitoring in Dialogue and Dissent alliances

Watershed
empowering citizens

IRC Supporting water sanitation and hygiene services for life

Simavi

Wetlands INTERNATIONAL

Akvo.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs