Supporting sustainable services using a District Wide Approach
WaterAid's support role and exit strategy

This document sets out some of the main service authority and service provider functions required for delivery of rural water supply services that don't simply fail at the end of their design life but continue to be renewed and upgraded in a planned manner. It describes how WaterAid and its partners can engage to support these different functions.

Introduction

This document does not attempt to present an ideal institutional template for service sustainability but rather composite blocks that can be arranged in different ways as part of a **District Wide Approach**[1],[2],[3]. It is a reference for discussions aimed at shaping the District Wide Approach, strategies for achieving service sustainability and plans for WaterAid's eventual exit from the districts where it works. This note complements the **Sector Strengthening Toolkit**[4] which can be used to understand the current strengths and weaknesses of the WASH sector in-country, and identify strategic opportunities for WaterAid to engage in strengthening key sector building blocks. It also complements the **Agenda For Change** initiative which aims to build strong and responsive in-country institutions.

What is a District Wide Approach?

A District Wide Approach focuses on the district as the geographical point of entry for WaterAid support with the desired outcome of the district having the systems, plans, finances, human resources, skills, knowledge, coordination and accountability mechanisms to achieve sustainable universal access. Evidence gathered at the district level is used for advocacy at the **national** level to push for the model to be scaled and address systemic blockages such as poor fiscal decentralisation to districts.

Why use a District Wide Approach?

WaterAid is a transient agency that will eventually leave the districts where it operates. WaterAid works through partner organisations which often include district local governments. Governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring that citizens receive services and for creating an enabling environment for services to be sustained. If the services that WaterAid has supported are to last beyond the design life of infrastructure a permanent entity (or entities) tasked with service provision, management and regulation must be in place together with the necessary accountability mechanisms. Only then can WaterAid exit, confident that users will receive the support they need. The question is, what must WaterAid do to strengthen

emerging service authorities, service providers and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that the resulting learning informs similar progress nationally? In other words, what is WaterAid's exit strategy and how does this form part of the District Wide Approach?

Under decentralisation, responsibility for ensuring that everyone has access to lasting WASH services in rural areas generally falls to district local government[5]. Local government takes on the role of a service authority with responsibility for planning service provision, regulating service provision and ensuring users receive affordable, sustainable services [6]. Local government may also provide services itself (acting as a service provider) or it may outsource these functions to other entities such as public providers, private providers, NGOs, CBOs or users.

Decentralisation of authority from national to local government level is rarely matched with decentralisation of finance or capacity. Necessary support from central government is not always forthcoming. Accountability mechanisms are also lacking. Consequently critical weaknesses exist in the responsiveness of institutions and their ability to address challenges to service sustainability. **Therefore, achievement of sustainability in the districts where we work will often require action beyond the district level at the national level. A strong national enabling environment is critical for a District Wide Approach to be effective.**

Whilst there is no generic institutional structure or arrangement that can address different realities and sustainability challenges at the local level, certain service authority, service provider and accountability functions are generally required for services to be delivered and sustained. A District Wide Approach involves understanding which of these functions (or building blocks) are relevant in a particular context and working to strengthen these whilst continuously monitoring outcomes to track service level improvement.

Obviously WaterAid are not the only actor working at the district or national level so a District Wide Approach must also involve understanding what others are doing and what strengths they bring to each sector function required to keep services running.

Functions of a service authority and WaterAid's supporting role

Understanding blockages that stand in the way of lasting services
There are multiple blockages that impede lasting services. These may be social, institutional, financial, environmental, legal, institutional, technical or capacity related. There can be divergent views on which blockages are most significant and which strategies are most appropriate for addressing them. There are a number of tools for bottleneck analysis and WaterAid/partners can facilitate the process of using these with different stakeholders.

Sector coordination
With so many actors involved in service provision (INGOs, NGOs, local government, private sector and national government) poor coordination brings fragmented service

www.wateraid.org/ppa   wateraid@wateraid.org

WaterAid 47-49 Durham Street London SE11 5JD   020 7793 4500

WaterAid is a registered charity: Australia: ABN 99 700 687 141. Canada: 119288934 RR0001. India: U85100DL2010NPL200169. Sweden: Org.nr: 802426-1268, PG: 90 01 62-9, BG: 900-1629.
UK: 288701 (England and Wales) and SC039479 (Scotland). US: WaterAid America is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization

2

delivery, competing agendas, unnecessary duplication and a lack of alignment with government processes[7]. Coordination of different actors around one district plan is necessary. WaterAid/partners can support this function by assisting the district with actor coordination and working within an agreed plan.

Monitoring
A service authority cannot plan effective investments in new or existing services unless it has an up-to-date picture of coverage, functionality and service levels. This requires the service authority to adopt a monitoring process that collects, analyses, updates and makes available data for planning. This monitoring function should ideally use nationally accepted harmonised indicators and feed information up into national sector performance monitoring structures. WaterAid has long supported efforts to harmonise indicators, develop monitoring protocols and ensure that information collected as part of monitoring feeds into planning and investment decisions.

Strategic planning
Delivery of new services and maintenance of existing services requires a clear strategic plan produced on a cyclical basis. If a service authority is responsible for functions beyond water and sanitation (as local governments are) it is necessary to produce a single strategic plan that guides all decisions and programmes across the district/municipality rather than a stand-alone WASH plan. WaterAid can support districts to assemble and own these plans.

Financing
Users rarely have sufficient funds to cover the cost of water supply service initiation and despite making contributions to cover O&M, they generally lack funds to pay for major maintenance. In addition, the direct support costs that would be incurred if a district was to adequately carry out monitoring, sector coordination and post implementation support to users are not always known or covered in budgets. If services are going to last beyond the design life of infrastructure it must be clear where necessary subsidies and revenues are going to come from. True lifecycle costs must be understood and matched to sources of funding (taxes, tariffs and transfers). WaterAid can support districts to understand full lifecycle costs and ensure these are matched to sources of finance.

Regulation
Service authorities have a regulatory responsibility, which involves ensuring that services are delivered in line with agreed norms and standards enshrined in legislation and sector guidance. Issues covered may include equity, tariffs and service levels.

Functions of a service provider and WaterAid's supporting role
Service authorities can undertake service provision themselves or they can outsource it to a public, private (through a Public Private Partnership), NGO, CBO or user entity.

Service delivery

High quality service implementation paying particular attention to user participation, equity, inclusion, gender, behaviour change, construction quality and value for money is necessary. WaterAid can demonstrate best practice setting out what works well and what does not through its service delivery portfolio.

Post implementation support

Community management is the dominant service delivery model in many rural areas. This in itself is not sufficient to keep services running over the long term partly due to an over dependence on volunteerism. Users inevitably require technical, management and financial support that does not exist within the community. The service authority or service provider must have the capacities and finances to deliver post implementation support on an ongoing basis. WaterAid has helped to strengthen post implementation support functions through support to handpump mechanic associations. Other post implementation support mechanisms can be explored.

Asset management and replacement

All infrastructure has a finite design life. There is no such thing as a pump that requires no maintenance or spare parts. Every technology, no matter how basic, has a maintenance overhead and will eventually fail. The WASH sector has not paid a great deal of attention to the need for planned asset management and replacement strategies, preferring instead to focus on ad-hoc rehabilitation programmes and the quest for holy grail 'maintenance free' technologies. These strategies have not to date yielded desired levels of service sustainability. There is now a need for greater attention to planned asset management and replacement strategies.

Accountability mechanisms

Every service provider contracted by the service authority needs to be accountable to service users and policy makers. The short route of accountability between service providers and service users must be strong. The long route of accountability between service providers and policy makers and between policy makers and service users must also be in place and operational. WaterAid has worked to strengthen accountability mechanisms through citizen's score carding exercises, service provider bench marking and citizen's action initiatives.

WaterAid's role and exit strategy

WaterAid currently supports some (but not all) of the different functions described above[8]. The extent to which each function is supported varies from country to country. The key to a District Wide Approach is to comprehensively support all relevant functions where necessary. Given that there is no template or institutional configuration that can address sustainability challenges across different contexts there is a need for local strategies and service delivery models that respond to specific needs making use of the different building blocks set out above where appropriate. It may be that other actors have different functions covered or certain

www.wateraid.org/ppa   wateraid@wateraid.org

WaterAid 47-49 Durham Street London SE11 5JD   020 7793 4500

WaterAid is a registered charity: Australia: ABN 99 700 687 141. Canada: 119288934 RR0001. India: U85100DL2010NPL200169. Sweden: Org.nr: 802426-1268, PG: 90 01 62-9, BG: 900-1629.
UK: 288701 (England and Wales) and SC039479 (Scotland). US: WaterAid America is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization

4

functions may already be performing well. WaterAid and partners can work to understand what is working well and what is not, plugging any gaps.

In some countries, full decentralisation may not have taken place. Responsibility for undertaking each service authority/service provider function may also be unclear with multiple institutions overlapping. Finance is likely to be limited. Advocacy is required to push for greater resources and clarity in such cases.

There is an opportunity for WaterAid to develop exit strategies incorporating actions that strengthen or facilitate the strengthening of service authority/service provider functions. These efforts can be applied from the point of entry into a particular district as part of a District Wide Approach rather than as we exit. WaterAid's District Wide Approach thus involves strengthening service authority and service provider functions as well as accountability mechanisms.

Development of exit strategies will involve analysing the various functions set out above in a particular district; working out what activities are already underway to strengthen these functions; working out what has to change at the national level to enable this strengthening; identifying where WaterAid can add value; thinking about who we need to partner with to do so. A useful first step involves using tools 1 and 2 in the Sector Strengthening Toolkit.

Paper prepared by Vincent Casey, Clare Battle, Henry Northover, Erik Harvey
First version August 2015
Updated July 2016, April 2017

---

[1] East Africa Regional Leadership Team. 2015. The District-Wide Approach: Practical Perspectives from East Africa Region. WaterAid.

[2] Uwejamomere. 2014. Achieving Universal Access to WASH – One District at a Time. WaterAid.

[3] WaterAid. 2014. Sector Strengthening Workshop – Southern Africa Report. WaterAid.

[4] Battle, Northover, Casey. 2015. Sector Strengthening Toolkit. WaterAid.

[5] Lockwood, Smits. 2011. Supporting Rural Water Supply. ITDG

[6] IRC. 2011. Roles and responsibilities of water service authorities and service providers. http://www.slideshare.net/ircuser/module-1-wsa-and-wsp-roles-and-responsibilities-presentation?from_action=save

[7] WaterAid. 2011. Sustainability Framework. http://www.wateraid.org/~/media/Publications/sustainability-framework.pdf

[8] WaterAid. Sustainability Survey. 2015

www.wateraid.org/ppa   wateraid@wateraid.org
WaterAid 47-49 Durham Street London SE11 5JD   020 7793 4500

WaterAid is a registered charity: Australia: ABN 99 700 687 141. Canada: 119288934 RR0001. India: U85100DL2010NPL200169. Sweden: Org.nr: 802426-1268, PG: 90 01 62-9, BG: 900-1629. UK: 288701 (England and Wales) and SC039479 (Scotland). US: WaterAid America is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization

5