

Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services at WaterAid

A Thematic Evaluation for Wateraid International

1 June 2018

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Including WaterAid's Management Response

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WATERAID'S MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

In December 2017, WaterAid commissioned an external evaluation to assess the understanding, operationalisation, relevance, and any early signs of effectiveness of its sector strengthening approach under our strategic “Sustainable Services” aim. The evaluation took place between January and June 2018. A team of external evaluation consultants, Samantha Boardley and Simon Mead, identified a set of recommendations to address challenges and barriers to WaterAid’s work related our sector strengthening for sustainable services approach. Below, we outline the detailed response and actions plans for each area of recommendations.

ENSURING IMPLEMENTATION

For each of the actions below, we have set clear deadlines for delivery. WaterAid will review progress against these on a six monthly basis, assessing whether the actions are on course to deliver. Evaluating progress on the recommendations will also be included in the Terms of Reference for the internal reviews of the Global Strategy Aims that will be conducted between 2018 and 2022, where applicable.

Oversight of the work and overall accountability for implementing the recommendations will be held by the Global Advocacy and Programme Executive group (GPAE), which includes representatives from across the WaterAid federation. This group, supported by programme support specialists, is responsible for implementation of the recommendations from all global evaluations.

1. DEFINING AND FRAMING SECTOR STRENGTHENING

Recommendation 1: Clearly establish and define what is sector strengthening for sustainable services and where/how does it fit within WaterAid’s other ways of working

Response

- WaterAid accepts that there is some lack of clarity on the definition of Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services, and how it links to other approaches.

- The Sector Strengthening for Sustainable services was originally conceived and developed in relation to our core work of WASH services for households. It has become obvious that the approach works equally well for WASH in Education and Health. Therefore, we now consider Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services is an approach and how we work across all thematic areas, programmes and advocacy. This understanding will underpin all actions in response to the evaluation’s recommendations.

Actions	Timeframe
Sector Strengthening for sustainable Services is clearly defined and links to other approaches clearly formulated	October 2018

Recommendation 2: Establish a formal sector strengthening working group or task team to develop core organisational documentation on sector strengthening

Response

- WaterAid accepts the principle of this recommendation.
- Where appropriate, we will consolidate, develop, test and gather evidence on the appropriateness and usefulness of tools, guidelines and approach papers while recognising the context specificities across CPs.
- We will continue collaboration with other organisations, e.g. the Agenda for Change group, in developing and refining these tools and guidelines and to foster increased coherence across the sector.
- WaterAid has already launched an internal online platform (KnowledgeNet) with a space for the consolidation of Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services documents and knowledge, and we are preparing to launch an e-learning on Sector Strengthening by March 2019.

Actions	Timeframe
Existing Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services documents are uploaded to KnowledgeNet	Completed
A “task team” consisting of relevant WaterAid staff across thematic areas, programmes, policy and advocacy is established. The group will report to the Global	August 2018

Programmes and Advocacy Executive (GPAE) on a quarterly basis.	
A Terms of Reference (ToR) accompanied by a work plan, considering the recommended areas for the ToR outlined by the consultants, is developed and signed off by GPAE.	September 2018
Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services Package as per ToR is completed, translated and uploaded to KnowlegdeNet	March 2019
E-learning (MOOC) on Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services is developed and run.	April – June 2019
The package is launched and disseminated ensuring that all CPs are aware of its existence	April 2019

Recommendation 3: Develop a critical path, or logical sequence, for sector strengthening building blocks

Response

- WaterAid acknowledges that identification and unlocking of bottlenecks are key for successful sector strengthening for sustainable services.
- We agree that a “Roadmap” such as that we co-developed with the Agenda for Change¹ members can be helpful in identifying the appropriate entry points for intervention. As part of addressing recommendation 1 and 2, we will amend existing tools and / or develop additional tools for CPs to identify an “ideal” pathway as part of their context analysis.
- At present, we will not establish a global “logical sequence” as we do not think it is possible to develop a “one fits all” approach to strengthening the WASH sector at national level or even at district level, considering the vastly different implementation contexts across CPs.

Action points to address this recommendation is included under recommendation 2.

2. FINANCING SECTOR STRENGTHENING

¹ Roadmap to develop a District WASH development plan

Recommendation 4: Build cost-sharing arrangements into all partnership agreements and Memorandums of Understanding with government bodies

Response

- WaterAid acknowledges that cost-sharing has been demonstrated to be successful in some specific contexts, and accepts that it is an ideal to work towards in achieving transformative change. WaterAid sees cost-sharing as an essential part of modelling service delivery particular in a context that has fiscal decentralisation.
- We do not agree that this may be the most appropriate approach in ALL partnerships. By incorporating such criteria for all our partnerships, we may alienate some government bodies or other partners who are unable to engage in such arrangement at the outset of a partnership. However, the principle can be established within partnership MoUs, where appropriate, and might influence our choices of which institutions or locations we choose to work in to best demonstrate transformational change.

Actions	Timeframe
Examples or case studies from CPs and other agencies on cost-sharing will be gathered and uploaded to KnowledgeNet, shared and discussed through our relevant communities of practice.	February 2019
A guidance document on cost-sharing will be developed, translated, and uploaded to KnowledgeNet as part of the “task group’s” work plan including changes made to the partnership guidelines.	March 2019

Recommendation 5: Prioritise and broaden partnerships with innovative, flexible and technical donors and supporters, including private sector

Response

- WaterAid agrees that iterative learning is vital in achieving transformative change, and that partnerships with innovative, flexible and technical donors are needed to support such process. While we recognise that it may be more challenging to secure funding through some “traditional” institutional donors for sector strengthening activities, some institutional

donors are becoming more open to the idea that a strong sector will lead to sustainable results. For example, we have recently secured funding through the Australian government for sector strengthening activities.

- Our collaborative work with the Agenda for Change partners is also aimed at shifting the perspective of donors and other sector actors on the need to fund and support sector strengthening approaches.
- WaterAid acknowledges that partnerships with the private sector for WASH services in CPs are underutilised. We will continue to develop our model of working with urban utility companies and other service providers, building on our experiences so far.
- WaterAid is currently strengthening its restricted income efforts including updating and developing resources on how to incorporate Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services into our proposals. A toolkit for project design has been developed recently to support continuous efforts to improve the design of projects within this area of work. Further, we believe that by strengthening our internal understanding and operationalisation of our approach (as recommended under 1 and 2), we will be better placed to write compelling proposals, targeting “traditional” institutional donors.

Actions	Timeframe
Continue to foster partnerships with key donors for sector strengthening for sustainable services such as H&MF, HSBC and utility companies in our member countries	March 2019 and ongoing
Continue to engage with the Agenda for Change initiative as a means to influence donors and other actors to fund sector strengthening approaches. Leverage the partnership to demonstrate evidence of success.	March 2019 and ongoing
Articulating our model for urban utility strengthening and approach to expand this as appropriate	December 2018
Integrating sector strengthening concepts into our communications and publicity materials targeting donors and supporters	December 2018
Work with our fundraising teams at member and CP level to strengthen their understanding of sector strengthening for sustainable services and ensure dedicated support is provided by technical experts	March 2019

Recommendation 6: Consider establishing a competitive basket fund for CPs to support sector strengthening initiatives in-country using internal unrestricted resources.

Response

- WaterAid UK has a competitive basket fund for CPs to apply to for funding of innovative strategic initiatives with potential for scaling, influencing and/or wider impact. This can include sector strengthening initiatives, if they meet the criteria of the fund.
- WaterAid acknowledges that our necessary growth in restricted fundraising has made it more challenging for CPs to fund sector strengthening activities. Through addressing recommendation 1, 2 and 5, WaterAid’s ability to develop proposals incorporating sector strengthening activities will improve and we believe more funders will begin funding this work as evidence of progress and success is shared.

Actions	Timeframe
Once we have assessed the first year of the current fund, we will make decisions on its targeting and usefulness for supporting Sector Strengthening work	March 2019

3. CAPACITY FOR SECTOR STRENGTHENING

Recommendation 7: Increase WaterAid’s internal capacity and its ability to access external expertise to achieve sector strengthening goals

Sub-recommendations:

- Complete a capacity/needs assessment
- Establish CP, regional and global mentors
- Develop more strategic partnerships and collaborations with others who have complementary skills, resources and experience
- Develop arrangements to share expertise within WaterAid and with other stakeholders

Response

- WaterAid acknowledges the need for a global level needs and capacity assessment. The needs assessment will be made part of the task group’s (recommendation 2) remit to explore, building on actions already being taken in WaterAid UK to address the issue of skills (see next bullet).
- WaterAid UK is currently undertaking a capacity assessment across all our thematic areas to determine actions needed to strengthen skills at CP and other levels.
- Linked with other thematic communities of practice, we will consider establishing a “Skills Databank” of both internal and external expertise to be easily able to link countries needing support with the right expertise. We will closely consider how this can be used as the basis for establishing mentors within specific areas.
- We are closely involved in Agenda for Change and other similar collaborations working on strengthening the WASH sector and we will share expertise with the partners and collaborate in specific countries as needed
- WaterAid conducts regular Webinars as a means to share expertise internally. WaterAid is also currently strengthening our internal means of sharing knowledge and experience through our Community of Practice and KnowledgeNet as well as planning an e-learning module on this topic.

Actions	Timeframe
A needs and capacity assessment completed and plan of action for how to address identified capacity gaps implemented (and translated as necessary).	August 2018 for period to March 2019
Ongoing capacity gaps and needs will be identified as part of WaterAid’s annual reporting and addressed by members on an as needed basis	March 2019 onwards
Consider the development of a “Skills Databank”, and how this may be used as the basis for establishing mentorship	March 2019

Other Action points to address this recommendation are included under recommendation 2

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In line with the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), WaterAid's Global Strategy (2015-2020) established the ambitious goal of working with partners in civil society, government and the private sector to catalyse transformational change to achieve universal Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) access – with a particular focus on the poorest and most marginalised – by 2030. To meet and sustain these ambitious goals, WaterAid determined that fundamental changes in its approaches were necessary. These included a significant increase in interventions that will allow governments to create an enabling and collaborative environment for all stakeholders to operate and cooperate effectively within to provide universal, affordable and sustainable WASH services including the poorest and most marginalised. Since the launch of the Global Strategy, WaterAid has supported its Country Programmes (CPs) to integrate sector strengthening for sustainable services into their CP Strategies and programmes. WaterAid has supported CPs in the understanding and implementation of the new approach through activities such as workshops, webinars and direct support, along with the development of new tools and guidance materials.

In December 2017, WaterAid International (WAI) commissioned an external and independent evaluation to assess organisational understanding, operationalisation, relevance, and any early signs of effectiveness of its sector strengthening approach. The evaluation took place between January and June 2018. This summary of findings and recommendations has been abbreviated from the full evaluation report. For readers using only this abridged summary, the Evaluation Team recommends that no definitive interpretation be made without studying the relevant sections of the full report.

Understanding

Understanding of the fundamentals of WASH sector strengthening is generally good among the CPs, but it is diverse, particularly in terms of how it is conceptualised. The 2015–2020 Global Strategy identifies “sustainable services” as one of four “strategic aims” together with equality, integration and hygiene. It is under the “sustainable services” aim that strengthening of WASH systems and capabilities of service authorities and providers is highlighted, resulting in the

understanding by most that “sector strengthening” efforts fall solely under this aim. This has caused confusion for some CPs attempting to map what they consider to be sector strengthening activities to Global Strategy priorities. For example, in discussing sector strengthening activities, some key informants chose to highlight examples of WASH integration in school and health initiatives, suggesting that to some, sector strengthening is a broader, more encompassing, concept, also nuanced across other strategic aims of the Global Strategy. This broader understanding is also evidenced by WaterAid’s documentation on the programmatic approach which suggests that sector strengthening, and the human rights-based approach are complementary work streams to effectively support and showcase initiatives that drive progress towards universal access.

The CPs’ understanding reflects elements of both the ‘what’ of sector strengthening (e.g. what WaterAid refer to as building blocks: sector performance monitoring; sector policy / strategy / planning; sector coordination; sector finance; institutional arrangements; sector accountability; water resources; and service delivery) as well as the ‘how’ of sector strengthening (e.g. capacity development, advocacy/influence, partnership models, integration). This understanding appears to be the result of experienced and responsive in-house expertise as well as global and regional support and programme-related sector strengthening workshops, webinars, tools, and guidance materials. However, the ‘light-touch’ and iterative approach to developing this understanding has also led to a lack of consistency and systematic cohesiveness across the global organisation as to what constitutes sector strengthening, whether it is an objective under the sustainable services strategic aim of the Global Strategy, an approach, a programme, or a cross-cutting theme, and subsequently, how it fits within WaterAid’s other core ways of working (e.g. programmatic, human-rights based, and district wide approaches). Without agreed definitions and a harmonised or consolidated approach to sector strengthening, significant confusion will remain, potentially impacting effective design, implementation, monitoring and reporting on sector strengthening activities and results.

CPs’ Strategies and programmes are generally well aligned with Global Strategy priorities while integrating elements of national context and needs (informed by

political and situational analyses). CPs' key documents relate closely to sector strengthening building blocks, although building block terminology is often not used, mainly due to many CP strategies and programme plans being developed prior to this terminology being finalised or well known within the organisation.

Operationalisation

CPs are already operationalising a diverse range of building blocks at both national and local levels. Their selection of building blocks has not been based solely on the priority needs identified in the WASH sector. Programming legacy is clearly a factor. CPs, such as Ghana and Malawi, have worked for many years in WASH service delivery and continue to do so through the District Wide Approach, onto which they are now integrating modelling approaches, along with some national-level sector strengthening activities. This utilises their competitive advantages of experience in this space, capacity and credibility with stakeholders. WA Cambodia, conversely, as a new CP with no legacy, has been able to focus predominantly on the national-level support it considers to be a priority.

One of the significant determinants in CPs' prioritisation of building blocks is the level of capacity in the CP. CPs were clear that having moved from a more tightly-defined focus, usually on service delivery, they do not have the full range of skills and experience necessary for supporting all of the priority sector needs identified. This lack of internal capacity was recognised by many of the CPs as a significant challenge in their ability to address priority issues, with sector finance issues such as life cycle costing and sector performance monitoring identified as some of the most pressing sector needs that they do not have the capacity to support effectively. While there have been some isolated successes, support and strengthening of national-level private sector involvement in the WASH sector has been minimal. This may also be considered by CPs to be an area where they do not feel that they currently have the capacity to address effectively. While WaterAid has provided ongoing capacity support to CPs, this is also constrained by availability and resources. Some CPs have successfully filled specific gaps in their capacity, through engaging consultants in areas such as life-cycle costing and others are partnering with the British utility companies Thames Water and

Yorkshire Water (facilitated and supported by the WA UK office) who are supporting project partners in specific technical areas for urban work.

The measurement of sector strengthening outcomes has also presented a significant challenge. This results from both the pressure from donors to measure WASH access and the difficulty of measuring sector strengthening outcomes especially in the longer term. CPs have also found that traditional donor project timeframes are a constraint as they do not allow for the longer timeframe required for sector strengthening outcomes or for the delays inherent in working closely with government.

Early signs of effectiveness

CPs have embraced the concept of increasing access to WASH services through demonstrating service delivery models to government authorities and thereby influencing change, and there have been significant successes where WaterAid activities, often at a district level, have led to changes in standards and guidelines at a national level. Many CPs have had significant success in influencing national WASH-related policies, strategies and guidelines. This has often been enhanced through developing improved sector coordination platforms allowing CPs a more unified and collaborative approach. There have also been some encouraging examples of wider replication, but these are currently isolated and often constrained by a lack of financial commitment by government. In many districts, the lack of financial resources is a major constraint, which often necessitates CPs providing operating costs, such as transportation for routine monitoring and maintenance, or office consumables for the duration of the project. Financial support such as this makes sustainability of such activities unlikely and requires revised criteria related to WaterAid's support of government partners, particularly the financial commitments that should be in place.

WaterAid CPs' efforts at sector strengthening are already showing some signs of effectiveness at both national and sub-national levels. Importantly, these contributions are not solely related to specific sector strengthening outcomes (e.g. the 'what' of sector strengthening) but also to the processes and approaches used to effectively contribute to these outcomes (e.g. the 'how' of sector strengthening). The latter include processes of advocacy/influencing, human

rights-based approaches, partnership, capacity development and alignment / harmonisation.

A number of CP efforts are showing promising results by placing demonstration of government authority service delivery models front and centre (e.g. the goal or objective), while strengthening other key building blocks as a means to achieve this. For example, in Ethiopia, efforts to strengthen municipal WASH service delivery by developing human, system and resource capacities of municipal utilities has secured both buy-in and financial commitments from two regional governments interested in scaling out the capacity development approach used. In Nicaragua, efforts to establish a national SMART WASH Centre aims to showcase appropriate and affordable technologies (particularly targeting isolated, remote and dispersed populations), supported by a comprehensive capacity development package to promote a life-cycle approach to construction and implementation. In Malawi, efforts to legalise and regulate private waste and water service providers in Lilongwe are showing signs of cost recovery and financial sustainability. In each of these examples, WaterAid CPs are ensuring that service delivery is modelled for purposes of both sustainability and scalability.

CPs are also making significant efforts to integrate a stronger HRBA focus into the WASH sector. Starting at the highest levels such as efforts to influence the inclusion of WASH as a human right in the Constitution of Burkina Faso, to local levels, where CPs such as Malawi and Ghana are building the capacity of rights holders to demand their WASH rights and building relationships and understanding between them and the duty bearers. WaterAid CPs are also facilitating the development of practical tools such as the 'National Guidelines on WASH for Persons with a Disability and Older People' in Cambodia, led by WaterAid and now endorsed by Government and throughout the sector to create an improved enabling environment that recognises the WASH rights of the poorest and most marginalised.

These results have often been achieved without CPs having a particularly structured, or clearly defined approach to sector strengthening and sometimes without the full range of skills required. These early signs of effectiveness in sector strengthening suggest that with more structured and focused support

even more may be achieved. This would include a well-articulated and comprehensive picture of an effective, efficient and sustainable WASH system for CPs to customise based on their own context and priorities and providing clarity on the integration of HRBA.

Relevance

WaterAid's focus on a sector strengthening approach is relevant to addressing WASH sector issues at global, national and local levels and is an appropriate response to meet the goal of universal WASH access by 2030. The sector strengthening approach was developed to address the challenges associated with meeting the SDGs and is closely aligned with global WASH collaborations including the Sanitation and Water for All and Agenda for Change partnerships with which WaterAid is a signatory and major contributor. Sector strengthening efforts in the countries where WaterAid is currently working are strongly aligned with national WASH sector priorities and work closely to support and partner with the appropriate government agencies. In most countries, respected as a leading WASH INGO, WaterAid has influenced a number of key national-level WASH sector policies, plans, and strategies. At sub-national levels, through the District Wide Approach, WaterAid CPs are working alongside decentralised institutions and within existing systems to strengthen capacities – human, system and resource – to deliver affordable and sustainable services at this level.

Recommendations

As a result of this evaluation, the following seven recommendations have been developed for consideration by WaterAid:

- a) Clearly establish and define what is sector strengthening for sustainable services and where/how does it fit within WaterAid's other ways of working
- b) Establish a formal sector strengthening working group or task team to develop core organisational documentation on sector strengthening
- c) Develop a critical path, or logical sequence, for sector strengthening building blocks
- d) Build cost-sharing arrangements into all partnership agreements and Memorandums of Understanding with government bodies

- e) Prioritise and broaden partnerships with innovative, flexible and technical donors and supporters, including private sector
- f) Consider establishing a competitive basket fund for CPs to support sector strengthening initiatives in-country using internal unrestricted resources
- g) Increase WaterAid's internal capacity and its ability to access external expertise to achieve sector strengthening goals

ACRONYMS

A4C	Agenda for Change
CLTS	Community Led Total Sanitation
CP	Country Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DWA	District Wide Approach
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HCF	Health Care Facility
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KII	Key Informant Interview
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PCD	Policy and Campaigns Department
PIMS	Post-implementation Monitoring Survey
PM	Project Manager
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PSU	Programme Support Unit
PT	Project Team
RMT	Regional Management Team
SC	Steering Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SI	Strategic Intent
SSfSS	Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services
SuSWASH	Sustainable WASH Services at Scale
SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
ToR	Terms of Reference
WAI	WaterAid International
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WAUK	WaterAid UK

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services

In line with the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), WaterAid's Global Strategy (2015-2020), established the ambitious goal of working with partners in civil society, government and the private sector to achieve universal Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) access – with a particular focus on the poorest and most marginalised – by 2030. To meet and sustain these ambitious goals, WaterAid determined that fundamental changes in its approaches were necessary. These included, a significant increase in interventions that will allow governments to create an enabling and collaborative environment for all stakeholders to operate, and cooperate, effectively within, to provide universal, affordable and sustainable WASH services for all. One of the four “Strategic Aims” included in the Global Strategy is “Sustainable Services”, where the focus of WaterAid's interventions is described as follows: *“we will support governments and service providers to strengthen the systems and capabilities required to deliver sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services”*.² Since the launching of the Global Strategy, WaterAid has supported its Country Programmes (CPs) to integrate sector strengthening for sustainable services (SSfSS) (hereafter referred to as sector strengthening) into their CP Strategies. WaterAid has supported CPs in the understanding and implementation of the new approach through activities such as workshops, webinars and direct support, along with the development of new tools and guidance materials.

1.2. Purpose of the Evaluation

WaterAid recognises that such a fundamental and global change in approach may be accompanied by challenges, including lack of clarity or consistency in understanding of approach, and challenges within CPs associated with introducing a new approach. WaterAid International (WAI) has therefore commissioned this evaluation to assess the status of its shift towards a sector strengthening approach, including the level of understanding of the approach, and the challenges and blockages that are being encountered by CPs. This will

² WaterAid, Everyone, Everywhere 2030: WaterAid's Global Strategy 2015 – 2020.

allow recommendations to be made for overcoming these, and support to CPs adjusted accordingly. An inception workshop held for this evaluation³ identified four key areas and one cross-cutting theme that were of particular interest to this evaluation:

Understanding: How is WA's approach to sector strengthening understood by CPs?

Process: What is the process by which CPs are identifying and prioritising sector strengthening efforts (e.g. building blocks) Using which tools, guidance, support or resources?

Operationalisation: How are CPs operationalising this understanding of the sector strengthening approach and which building block are CPs currently focussing on?

Early evidence of effectiveness: although early in the implementation of a rather large, complex strategic shift for the organisation, what (if any) is the early evidence to suggest that WaterAid's sector strengthening approach is strengthening local and national WASH systems?

Enablers and barriers (cross-cutting): What are the barriers/enablers to understanding and operationalising SSfSS? Therefore, where must WaterAid direct its efforts to meet its Global Strategy objective for this theme?

Equally important, what this evaluation is *not* is an evaluation against defined organisational sector strengthening targets or objectives. While WaterAid International has developed a new assessment framework for the Global Strategy which includes core policy change indicators for each of the four strategic aims of the Global Strategy (including sustainable services), internal piloting of this framework was still ongoing at the outset of this evaluation. Work on the Global Strategy assessment framework is distinct and separate from this evaluation. Furthermore, this evaluation does not include CP-level evaluations of performance in this area. Rather, CP experiences in understanding, adopting and applying a sector strengthening approach were collected as inputs to inform broader findings and recommendations for the organisation as a whole. Also

³ Held in WAUK office on London, January 2018

what this evaluation is not is a needs or capacity assessment of the organisations' in-house ability to deliver on sector strengthening objectives (although the need for such does emerge in the final recommendations). Finally, this evaluation does not consider WaterAid's global policy and influencing work on sector strengthening, determined to be out of scope for this evaluation.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section presents a conceptual model of WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening as developed collaboratively with WaterAid staff for purposes of this evaluation. Also included in this section is the evaluation framework, a

A note about sector strengthening versus sector strengthening for sustainable services

Sector strengthening efforts can serve a variety of different objectives. In the absence of clear internal sector strengthening definitions or objectives to guide the scope of this evaluation, however based on discussions had as part of this evaluation, one might conclude that sector strengthening initiatives serve to achieve effective, efficient, equitable, and sustainable services.

Sustainability is a broad, complex, and multi-dimensional concept. For the purposes of this evaluation, and in attempt to manage scope, the evaluators have made considerable effort to isolate for observations and results related to sustainability of services only (as per the Terms of Reference, see Appendix e). However, it must be noted that sustainability in itself is not distinct from delivery of services, effectiveness of services, efficiency of services, or equity of services. Rather, sustainability is embedded within, and cross-cutting to, all sector strengthening objectives, approaches and building blocks. It is the authors intent that some scope creep and ‘blurred lines’ apparent in this report serve to provoke deeper internal reflection and discussion about how each “sector strengthening” and “sustainable services” are defined moving forward.

separate section on the data collection approach and methods, as well as a discussion on the limitations of this evaluation.

2.1. Developing a Conceptual Model

Within WaterAid, there is currently no harmonised or consolidated model or approach for sector strengthening. While the organisation has concretely elaborated a number of frameworks and approaches by which work is to be guided, as well as diagnostic and monitoring tools to support the effective implementation of such approaches, no single, unified, framework or approach

paper or model yet exists that elaborates WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening.

In the absence of such guidance – the basis of which is necessary to develop evaluation criteria, or the criteria by which the organisations' sector strengthening activities would be evaluated against – a conceptual model of WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening for sustainable services was developed (Figure 1). This model was developed collaboratively amongst WaterAid staff and led by the Evaluation Consultants as part of a participatory evaluation design workshop in January 2018. The foundation for the conceptual model was developed predominantly based on the following six key approaches, frameworks and tools (including both internal and external resources), identified by participants to be the most relevant to sector strengthening for sustainable services:

1. WaterAid's Programmatic approach
2. WaterAid's Human rights-based approach
3. WaterAid's District wide approach
4. WaterAid's Sustainability framework
5. Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Framework – including sector building blocks and collaborative behaviours
6. WaterAid's own Sector Building Blocks⁴

⁴ As articulated in the document: Achieving a step change in sector performance: towards universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene, WaterAid March 2017

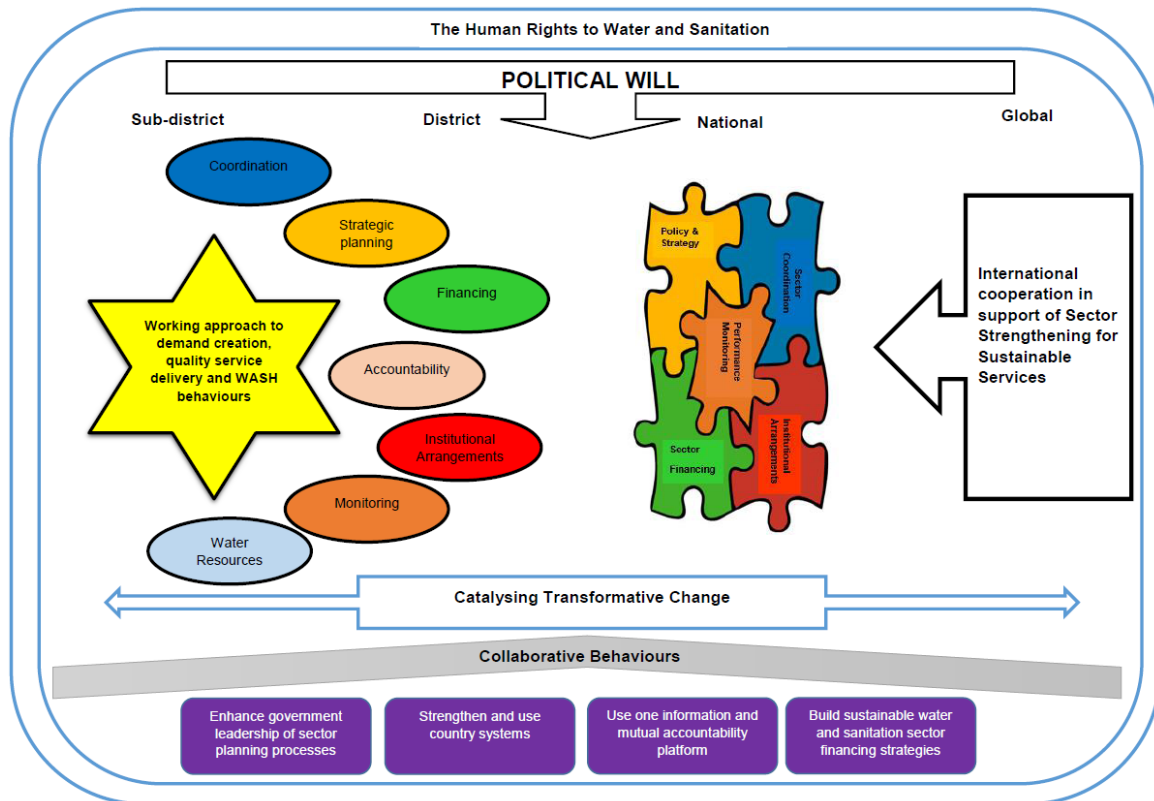


Figure 1. Preliminary Conceptual Model of WaterAid’s Sector Strengthening Approach (developed as part of a collaborative effort to establish evaluation scope)

Based on the above conceptual model, the Evaluation Consultants identified **nine core elements as central to WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening for sustainable services** (Table 1). These nine core elements – including eight recognised building blocks – provide the basis for the evaluation scope, further elaborated as part of the evaluation framework described in Section 2.2.

Table 1. Evaluation scope for sector strengthening for sustainable services at WaterAid

1. **Sector performance monitoring** (*at national and sub-national levels*)
2. **Sector policy / strategy / planning** (*at national and sub-national levels*)
3. **Sector coordination** (*at national and sub-national levels*)
4. **Sector finance** (*at national and sub-national levels*)
5. **Institutional arrangements** (*at national and sub-national levels*)
6. **Sector accountability** (*at national and sub-national levels*)[†]
7. **Water resources** (*at national and sub-national levels*)[†]
8. **Service delivery** (*at sub-national level only*)
9. **Human-right to water and sanitation** (*using key characteristics of the human-rights based approach*⁵)

[†] While sector accountability and water resources were originally identified as building blocks at sub-national level only, data collection activities revealed that activities in these areas were also ongoing at national-level. As such, data analysis activities were revised to include a review of these activities at both national and sub-national levels, where applicable.

As such, for the purposes of this evaluation report, the term ‘building block’ refers to the 8 building blocks identified above. The term sub-building block, while not explicitly used anywhere within WaterAid documentation, has been introduced here to refer to key elements, components or activities characteristic of an effective, functional building block. Sub-building blocks were identified as part of a comprehensive document review of WaterAid internal documentation.

2.2. Evaluation Framework

Based on both the terms of reference for this evaluation (Appendix f) and an initial list of research and evaluation questions prepared by the evaluation’s Steering Committee and revised by workshop participants, an evaluation framework was developed to identify which questions were of greatest interest to the organisation and to guide how each question would be answered. The evaluation framework (Table 2) elaborates four evaluation criteria – understanding, operationalisation, early evidence of effectiveness, and relevance – into four key evaluation questions (KEQs). Each KEQ also identifies a number of

⁵ As described in: Embedding and integrating a human rights-based approach in WaterAid programmes, WaterAid, no date.

A Methodological Note about Evaluating Early Signs of Effectiveness

Evaluating early signs of effectiveness of WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening has provoked disagreement since preliminary evaluation design meetings and workshops. As WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening is considered a new 'shift' only introduced under the current Global Strategy (and therefore only operationalised through the latest CP Strategies, most of which were finalised in 2016), some WaterAid staff suggested that it was too early to assess even early signs of effectiveness. Others maintained that early signs of effectiveness, however few or difficult to determine, were important to capture for purposes of organisational learning and scale-out.

In evaluation, formative (or midline / mid-term) evaluations such as this typically focus on assessing activities, outputs and process, to determine whether or not a programme or project is on track to meet its intended outcomes, goals or targets. Evaluating early signs of effectiveness is common in formative evaluations, with emphasis on "early". For the purposes of this evaluation, evaluating early signs of effectiveness was done by assessing the activities, outputs and processes employed by CPs that appear most promising in their ability to deliver sustainable sector strengthening outcomes in the long term. This included evidence of where WaterAid had supported key sector actors (e.g. governments, service authorities and service providers) to (i) adopt and institutionalise guiding policies that can lay the foundation for effective WASH systems; or (ii) lead and/or invest their own resources in efforts initially introduced, piloted or demonstrated by WaterAid-led initiatives. In order to evaluate the true effectiveness of these measures in catalysing stronger, more robust, sustainable WASH systems in-country, terminal (or end-line) evaluations of projects and programmes are critical. Methods such as outcome-harvesting or contribution tracing are effective means to trace changes in typically complex, multi-variate, multi-stakeholder, WASH systems back to WaterAid efforts.

sub-questions that help better 'unpack' each KEQ. Indicators for each KEQ identifying what would be assessed in order to respond to the question were developed and approved by the Steering Committee. Data sources and collection methods together with targeted stakeholders were also identified to guide the execution of the evaluation.

Table 2. Evaluation Framework

Key Evaluation Question 1: To what extent is WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening understood internally (within WaterAid)? Externally (within other WASH-related NGOs, partners and government stakeholders)?

Sub-questions:

- *What are the enablers/barriers to understanding WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening?*
- *How effective was the communication / dissemination of WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening?*

<i>Indicator (what will be assessed for compatibility with conceptual model)</i>	<i>Data Sources and Collection Methods</i>	<i>Targeted stakeholder(s)</i>
1a: Extent of alignment / synergy between core elements of WA’s SSfSS approach (i.e. conceptual model), and CP staff understanding (and any discrepancies between)	Global survey (SurveyMonkey), Key Informant Interviews (CP-level) Key Informant Interviews (Non-CP level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional Directors and Technical Advisors ▪ Country Programme staff (including Directors, Managers, and Technical Staff across Programmes, Projects, Policy/Advocacy and Funding/Proposal development)
1c: Extent of alignment / synergy between core elements of WA’s SSfSS approach (i.e. conceptual model), and external stakeholders	Key Informant Interviews (Non-CP level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Government stakeholders ▪ Other NGOs/ aid agencies in country WASH sector such as Water for People; UNICEF; DfID SNV (as appropriate, time-permitting)

understanding (and any discrepancies between)		<i>** specific stakeholders to be identified by country-visit case studies **</i>
Key Evaluation Question 2: To what extent is WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening being operationalised within Country Programmes?		
<i>Sub-questions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>What are the enablers/barriers to operationalising WaterAid’s approach to sector strengthening?</i> ▪ <i>What was the process by which CPs identified their respective strategic priorities (or priority building blocks)? Which building blocks are CPs currently prioritising?</i> ▪ <i>To what extent are WaterAid’s current <u>tools</u>, <u>guidance</u>, and <u>support resources</u> on sector strengthening considered <u>fit-for-purpose</u>?</i> 		
<i>Indicator (what will be assessed for compatibility with conceptual model)</i>	<i>Data Sources and Collection Methods</i>	<i>Targeted stakeholder(s)</i>
2a: Extent of alignment / synergy between core elements of WA’s SSfSS approach (i.e. conceptual model), and what is reflected in CPs operational documents (and any discrepancies between)	Document Review (CP-Level) – see Table 3, particularly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country Programme Strategies ▪ Country Programmes ▪ Regional and CP Strategy Plans ▪ Government / national WASH planning documents 	
	Key Informant Interviews (CP-Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country Programme Directors and Managers

	Global survey (SurveyMonkey),	
2b: Extent of alignment / synergy between core elements of WA's SSfSS approach (i.e. conceptual model), and CPs project implementation activities (and any discrepancies between)	<p>Document Review (CP-Level) – see Table 3, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional and Country Programme Strategy Plans – Annual update (FY 18/19) and six-month reports (FY 17/18) ▪ Diagnostic studies ▪ Project design documents ▪ Project proposals / grant applications ▪ Project monitoring reports ▪ MoUs /agreements with partners (NGOs and governments) ▪ Workshop reports and training materials 	
	Key Informant Interviews (CP-Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional Directors and Technical Advisors ▪ Country Programme staff (including Directors, Managers, and Technical Staff across Programmes, Projects, Policy/Advocacy and Funding/Proposal development)

	Country visits and direct project observation (where possible)	
2c: Number and utility score of SSfSS tools, support and guidance resources that WA Members and CPs have used to date	Global survey Key Informant Interviews (CP-level)	
2d: CP satisfaction levels with SSfSS tools, support and guidance received to date	Global survey (SurveyMonkey), Key Informant Interviews (CP-level)	
<p>Key Evaluation Question 3: How <u>effective</u> is WaterAid’s approach to strengthening national, district and sub-district systems for the provision of sustainable WASH services?</p> <p><i>Sub-questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>What evidence do we have to suggest that WaterAid is on track to help strengthen national, district and sub-district <u>systems, plans and capabilities</u>, by 2020?</i> ▪ <i>What are the enablers/barriers to strengthening these systems, plans and capabilities services?</i> 		
<i>Indicator (what will be assessed for compatibility with conceptual model)</i>	<i>Data Sources and Collection Methods</i>	<i>Targeted stakeholder(s)</i>

<p>3a: Extent to which WA's sector strengthening initiatives are reported to be supporting / contributing to sustainable WASH systems, plans and capabilities in-country</p>	<p>Key Informant Interviews (CP-Level; external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country Programme staff (including Directors, Managers, and Technical Staff across Programmes, Projects, and Policy/Advocacy) ▪ Key Government stakeholders ▪ Other NGOs/ aid agencies in country WASH sector such as Water for People; UNICEF; DfID SNV (as appropriate) <p>** specific stakeholders to be identified by country-visit case studies **</p>
	<p>Document Review (CP-Level) – see Table 3, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government / national WASH planning documents ▪ National media / press coverage (<i>as provided by CPs</i>) 	
	<p>Project site visits (for Country Visits only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Field Teams
<p>3b: Confidence scores, or descriptions</p> <p><i>(to be developed as part of KII Guidelines for CP-Level,</i></p>	<p>Key Informant Interviews (CP-Level; external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Government stakeholders ▪ Other NGOs/ aid agencies in country WASH sector such as Water for People; UNICEF; DfID SNV (as appropriate)

<p><i>external stakeholders. Can provide an indication of how strongly other WASH actors in-country, including government, think WA can support in-country needs, priorities, and realities in the coming years).</i></p>		
<p>Key Evaluation Question 4: How relevant is WASH sector strengthening work in the countries where WaterAid is currently working? What is WaterAid’s value-add to sector strengthening work in-country?</p>		
<p><i>Indicator (what will be assessed)</i></p>	<p><i>Data Sources and Collection Methods</i></p>	<p><i>Targeted stakeholder(s)</i></p>
<p>4a. Sector / institutional context for WASH sector strengthening in-country</p>	<p>Key Informant Interviews (CP-Level; external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country Programme staff (including Directors, Managers, and Technical Staff across Programmes, Projects, and Policy/Advocacy) ▪ Key Government stakeholders ▪ Other NGOs/ aid agencies in country WASH sector such as Water for People; UNICEF; DfID SNV (as appropriate) <p>** specific stakeholders to be identified by country-visit case studies **</p>
	<p>Global survey</p>	

	<p>Document Review (CP-Level; <i>for case study countries only</i>) – see Table 3, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government / national WASH planning documents 	
4b. Extent of alignment / synergy between national sector strengthening WASH priorities, and WA's Country Strategy and Programmes.	<p>Document Review (CP-Level; <i>for case study countries only</i>) – see Table 3, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country Programme Strategies ▪ Country Programme Plans 	
	Global survey	
	<p>Key Informant Interviews (CP-Level; external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country Programme staff (including Directors, Managers, and Technical Staff across Programmes, Projects, and Policy/Advocacy) ▪ Key Government stakeholders ▪ Other NGOs/ aid agencies in country WASH sector such as Water for People; UNICEF; DfID SNV (as appropriate) ▪ ** specific stakeholders to be identified by country-visit case studies **

2.3. Data Collection Approach and Methods

In order to capture both the breadth and depth of WaterAid’s sector strengthening activities across twenty-five CPs, a two-stream approach to data collection was used (Figure 2). The first stream developed a global snapshot of the state-of-play of sector strengthening understanding, activities and early evidence of effectiveness reported across all CPs. A second stream of data collection and analysis allowed a more detailed review of eight CPs and was used to complement survey data with case study development. Of the eight case studies developed, four were ‘deep dive’ case studies and included country visits.

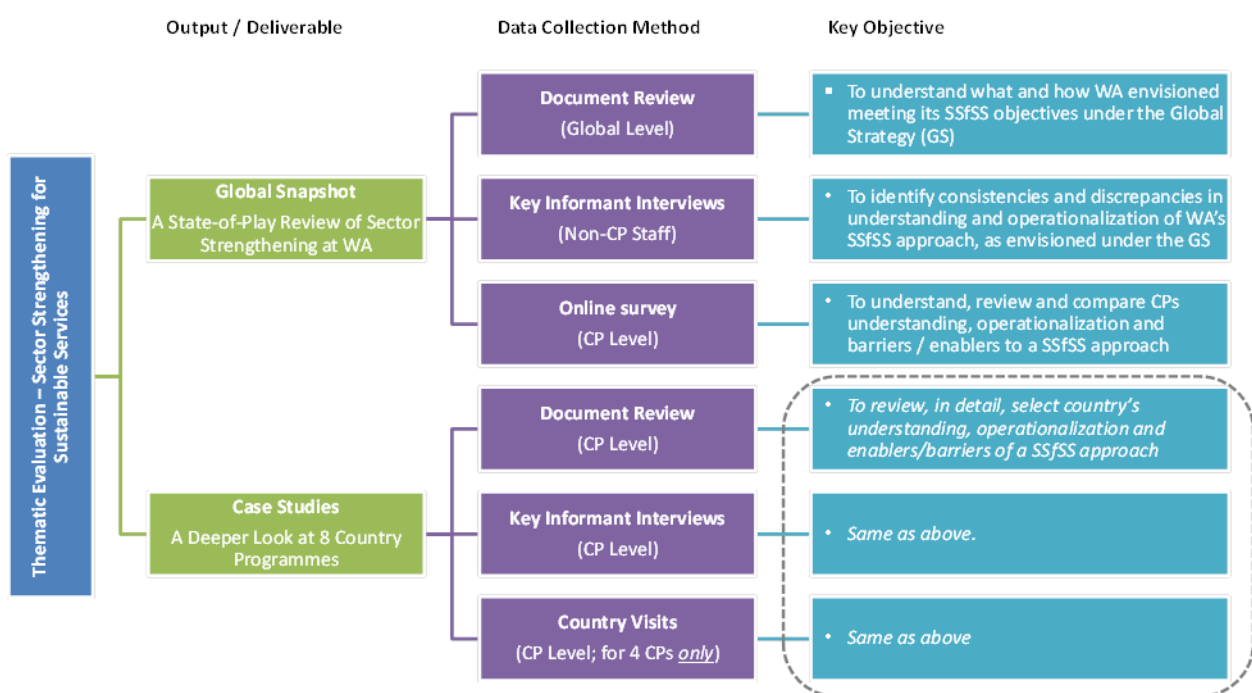


Figure 2. Data Collection Approach

In order to complete this evaluation, four core data collection methods were used. Each are described in further detail below.

Document Review (global and country-level): A list of almost 40 priority, global-level recommended documents relevant to sector strengthening were provided to the consultants by WaterAid. These documents were divided into four categories – (i) global strategy; (ii) thought leadership; (iii) translation of approach into practice; and (iv) implementation of approach. Additional documents as both requested by Consultants or recommended by WaterAid staff

during interviews, meetings and discussions, were also collected and reviewed as necessary.

Documents were collected by WaterAid staff – mostly from Project Centre. A list of common document types consulted during the preparation of each case study is included in Table 3. Additional and complementary documents as provided directly from CP key informants were reviewed on a case-by-case basis as required.

Table 3. Key documents reviewed for selected case study CPs

Document Type	Key information to be reviewed
Country Programme Strategies	CP strategies were reviewed to identify to what extent sector strengthening had been integrated in to strategy and programmes. Current and previous CP strategies were reviewed for comparison where available.
CP Programme and Business Plans (and other working documents)	Operational documents that guide the implementation and resourcing of the strategic intents and pathways identified in the CP Strategies. The CP Programme Plans include a programme results framework – including outcomes and indicators (with baseline and target values) – as well as a M&E Plan. As such these documents provided good insight into how CPs are elaborating and defining any Programmes related to SS
CP Strategy Plan Annual Updates for FY 18/19 and Six-month Report April-Sept 2017	For contextual changes, key activities and milestones achieved, and a review of how, if at all, SS approaches and narratives were changing. Many of these documents also include requests for support which were reviewed for SS related requests and follow-up.

Quarterly CP Programme Performance Reflection Summaries 2017/2018	Where available, these provided insight into CPs performance and associated challenges, especially related to sector strengthening activities.
Media / press coverage (of WA initiatives in the local or national news)	As available (e.g. Burkina Faso), media coverage provided a good indicator of alignment of WA activities with local or national activities and priorities.
Project design documents	Project design documents were reviewed to determine the extent to which sector strengthening approaches had been adopted within the CPs project portfolio, and whether the design and language reflects an appropriate level of understanding of the approach. Where projects still included a service delivery component, these were reviewed for what models/approaches were being integrated to support sector strengthening objectives, as well as service delivery objectives.
Monitoring documents	Any available project monitoring documentation, to see how sector strengthening activities/efforts were progressing and the challenges cited.
Project proposals/grants	Project proposals and grant funding documents were reviewed to better understand the evolution of sector strengthening narrative and discourse within a CP; to determine whether sector strengthening approaches were being reflected in the pipeline of projects, and to assess changing levels of understanding.
Workshop reports and training materials	Workshop reports and training materials (Regional and CP) were reviewed to determine appropriateness of content, consistency with “global” message and to triangulate information given by CP staff on training received.

Key Informant Interviews: Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with five types of key informants (Table 4). For deep-dive case studies where in-country field visits were organised, attempts to consult with project beneficiaries were also made in order to validate and ground-truth observations made by CP and implementing partner staff. Interview and field visit guidelines for each were developed in line with international good practice and approved by the Project Team (Appendix a). For a complete list of stakeholders consulted, see Appendix c.

Table 4. Key informant interview types and objectives

Category	Output	Objectives / rationale
WA International, Member Country and Regional office staff	Global Snapshot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify how understanding, approaches and challenges in the roll-out of a SS approach differ across the levels of governance of WA To confirm, clarify and triangulate Consultants understanding of SS approaches and roll-out, as observed from the document review
WA CP staff	Case Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify levels of understanding and operationalisation of SS approaches across a range of CP staff – from Country Directors, to Senior Managers, to Funding and Grant Writing staff To identify successes (early evidence of effectiveness) and challenges observed in the roll-out of a SS approach, including levels of satisfaction with WA support and resources
WA CP partner organisations <i>** National or local government, or NGO's; organisations receiving direct support (technical or financial) for implementing WA initiatives. **</i>	Case Studies <i>(deep-dive only)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify how WA's SS efforts were being received in the wider WASH sector. <i>(dependent)</i>
External/Independent WASH sector actors and stakeholders <i>** Only stakeholders not receiving direct financial support</i>	Case Studies <i>(deep-dive only)⁶</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify how WA's SS efforts were being received in the wider WASH sector. <i>(independent)</i>

⁶ Malawi only. While KIIs with external and independent WASH sector actors were not organised in Burkina, attempts to secure interviews in Ghana and Ethiopia were unsuccessful due to time and availability constraints.

*from WA were part of this category. ***

Project (direct)	beneficiaries	Case Studies (<i>deep-dive</i>) ⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To triangulate, validate and ground-truth successes and challenges as summarised by WA CP and partner staff.
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Case studies (country visits four CPs only): Of the eight CPs selected for case study development by WA (see Appendix e for case study selection criteria), four were selected for deep-dive analysis. Selected CPs included Burkina Faso (March 12 – 16th); Ghana (March 19th – 23rd); Malawi (April 3 – 6th) and Ethiopia (April 10 – 13th), where 4 – 5-day country visits were arranged. While evaluation consultants split country visits, Ghana was led by both consultants as an opportunity to discuss and refine methodology and ensure consistency in the data collection approach. In addition to the document review and KIIs completed in the development of desk-based case studies for Nicaragua, Pakistan, Cambodia and Timor-Leste, additional activities that were completed in-country as part of data collection methods for deep-dive case studies included:

In-country KIIs with CP partner organisations (including government and NGOs) as well as external and independent WASH sector actors and stakeholders (see Table 4);

- Project site visits for discussions with implementing partners (including governments and NGOs), as well as direct project beneficiaries (*as appropriate and time permitting*);
- A participatory workshop with CP staff to discuss, elaborate, refine, clarify or synthesise country visit findings (completed on the last day of the mission)

Online Survey: Between April 11 – 30th, an online survey on sector strengthening for sustainable services was open for completion by CPs. The purpose of the survey was to develop a global snapshot of sector strengthening activity within WA. Data collected through the online survey included but was not limited to: (i) which building blocks CPs were working on; (ii) which sector strengthening

⁷ Burkina Faso and Malawi only. Time constraints and limitations prevented site visits in other deep-dive case study countries.

resources CP were using and their ranked utility; (iii) how CPs were integrating a programmatic and a human-rights based approach; and (iv) CP successes and challenges in understanding and operationalising a sector strengthening approach. See Appendix b for the complete survey. The survey was developed and administered using SurveyMonkey⁸ – a free, online survey platform commonly used to develop, distribute, collect and analyse survey data.

2.4. Limitations

The following limitations to this evaluation are noted:

Identifying a clear scope and boundaries for sector strengthening efforts:

Parameterising sector strengthening is complex. A WASH system in itself is a complex construct of stakeholders (state and non-state), institutions, systems and processes. Therefore, identifying what activities and results constitute and exemplify sector strengthening, particularly in the absence of clear guidance (see Section 2.1), is challenging. For example, in conducting KIIs and in-country visits for purposes of this evaluation, many CPs chose to highlight efforts related to integration of WASH considerations and priorities in education and health sectors. While integration may certainly be considered reflective of sector strengthening efforts, it is also a separate and standalone strategic aim under WaterAid's Global Strategy. A similar challenge exists with the consideration of HRBA which has strong links with sector strengthening and the accountability building block (and has therefore been integrated into the Conceptual Model), but also has considerable overlap with equality, which is another separate strategic aim in the Global Strategy. In fact, sector strengthening for sustainable services could be conceptualised to include elements of all three other strategic aims of the Global Strategy – integration, equality and hygiene. As such, scoping and defining clear boundaries for the evaluation, with the time and resources allocated, was a challenge without getting into a much larger formative evaluation of the Global Strategy itself.

⁸ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

Low survey response rate and other survey limitations: The online survey administered as part of this evaluation attracted a response rate of only 44%⁹. It is understood that at the time of deployment (April 11 – 30th, 2018), CPs had a number of competing demands and deliverables. A number of extensions to the open period for the survey were granted. As a result of the relatively low response rate, it is undetermined whether or not survey findings are representative of the experience of the majority of CPs. Another limitation of the online survey is that without external or independent verification, survey responses provide only binary information related to whether or not a CP is addressing a particular building block or sub-building block (e.g. a yes/no response). There is no indication for how effectively the responding CP understands the objectives or activities necessary to target the identified building block, or sub-building block. As such, the majority of survey findings included in this report are only those that could be further corroborated through detailed case study findings. Other survey results are included where WA has made specific requests to do so. The limitations of these findings are presented in text or footnote.

Evaluations inherently provoke political interests: While developing detailed case studies is an effective means to review the diverse experiences of CPs operating in very different WASH sector environments, the evaluators encountered strong positive bias from some CPs visited as part of the “deep dive” case studies. Although a number of good practices were deployed in attempt to minimise this bias¹⁰, semantics and time limitations may have ultimately hindered evaluators’ ability to gather the complete CP story and learn from both strong and challenging experiences with sector strengthening efforts. This effect may or may not have been accentuated by the presence of a WaterAid staff member as part of all in-country KIIs.

⁹ While 12 CPs responded (48%), responses from one CP were deleted due to non-compliance with survey instructions that could not be reconciled as part of the data cleaning process. As a result, only 11 responses were fit for analysis, representative of a 44% response rate).

¹⁰ Examples of which include: in-country evaluation activities being introduced to CPs as part of the data collection process for an evaluation of WAI, and not an evaluation of the CP itself. This was an attempt to promote candidness regarding what works well and what does not. Furthermore, sample country visit agenda’s proposed key informant interviews with WASH sector actors who were both external and independent from WA CP activities (e.g. those with strong knowledge of the sector but no potential conflict of interest in the outcome of the evaluation – financial or otherwise). Finally, sample country visit agenda’s also proposed site visits to two different sites to allow comparison between either one more traditional service delivery activity and one more systems oriented, and/or one site where SS efforts were showing uptake and buy-in, and another where progress was more limited.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Understanding of WaterAid's Approach to Sector Strengthening

Based on extensive document review and KIIs, WaterAid's understanding of sector strengthening appears largely fluid and iterative. Considerable confusion exists as to where sector strengthening efforts best fit in the organisation's core procedures and documentation. The 2015–2020 Global Strategy identifies "sustainable services" as one of four "strategic aims" together with equality, integration and hygiene. It is under the "sustainable services" aim that strengthening of WASH systems and capabilities of service authorities and providers is highlighted, resulting in the understanding by most that "sector strengthening" efforts fall solely under this aim¹¹. This has caused confusion for some CPs attempting to map what they consider to be sector strengthening activities to Global Strategy priorities. For example, in discussing sector strengthening activities, some key informants chose to highlight examples of WASH integration in school and health initiatives, suggesting that to some, sector strengthening was a broader, more encompassing, concept nuanced across other strategic aims of the Global Strategy as well. This broader understanding is also evidenced by WaterAid's documentation on the programmatic approach which suggests that sector strengthening, and the human rights-based approach are complementary work streams to effectively support and showcase models of service delivery while advocating for "*sustainable and equitable delivery of WASH services for all*".¹²

Other significant discrepancies arose across the organisation in the articulation of 'what' is sector strengthening and 'how' sector strengthening is done. This was first apparent during the participatory evaluation design workshop which attempted to scope this evaluation by elaborating and conceptualising what is WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening. Central to this discussion (and the resulting conceptual model, Figure 1) were sector building blocks. However, both within WaterAid and the broader international community working on WASH (e.g. SWA and Agenda for Change), there is currently no consensus on a standard,

¹¹ The Terms of Reference for this evaluation suggest directly that "*WaterAid has embedded our work on this theme [Sector Strengthening for Sustainable Services] through the 'sustainable services' aim of our Global Strategy.*"

¹² WaterAid, no date. International Programmatic Approach. 1st April, no year.

or core, set of building blocks. Table 5 below suggests that WaterAid's conceptualisation of these building blocks has evolved over the years, which, while indicative of an adaptive, iterative and learning approach to defining sector strengthening, appears to be causing confusion at the CP level.

Evidence of this confusion emerged mostly around (i) sector accountability, where all case study CPs agreed accountability was equally critical at national level and needed to be explicit at this level (rather than embedded under performance monitoring); (ii) sector capacity, which is not currently explicit in any of WaterAid's internal building blocks although embedded under institutional arrangements and strongly apparent under the SWA building blocks; and (iii) service delivery, whether this was a building block, or rather part of an objective of sector strengthening (e.g. sector strengthening for sustainable service delivery) or a means to achieve universal access (e.g. everyone everywhere by 2030). See Figure 3 for one example of a sector strengthening approach that puts sustainable service delivery at the core of sector strengthening efforts.

Table 5. The evolution of WASH sector building blocks as used by WaterAid, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) and Agenda for Change (A4C)

<p>From: 2014 South African Workshop Report (March 2014)¹³</p> <p><i>** the below are presented as the 'essential functions' of an effective WASH system at district level **</i></p>	<p>From: South Sanitation and Water for All (March 2016)¹⁴</p> <p><i>** the below are presented as the "key elements that the sector must have in place to be able to deliver sustainable services and progressively eliminate inequalities in access". **</i></p>	<p>From: Achieving a step change in sector performance: towards universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene (March 2017)</p> <p>Also from: Agenda for Change: A Roadmap for Universal Access to Sustainable WASH Services at District Level (August 2017)</p> <p><i>** the below are presented as 'sector</i></p>	<p>From: Supporting sustainable services using a District Wide Approach: WaterAid's support role and exit strategy (August 2015; updated April 2017)</p> <p><i>** the below are presented as 'functions' of 'composite blocks' of both service authorities (SAs) or service providers (SPs) **</i></p>	<p>From: Strengthening WASH systems for sustainable services at district level: WaterAid's district sustainability analysis tool (August 2017)</p> <p><i>** the below are presented as 'key sector building blocks' at district level **</i></p>
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¹³ This workshop is commonly cited by key informants as one of the first attempts to discuss, articulate, conceptualise and agree on a common approach to sector strengthening.

¹⁴ <http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/about/building-blocks/> (accessed 31st May 2018)

<i>building blocks' to building effective sector systems at national and local levels **</i>						
1	Working model of service delivery	--	--	--	Service delivery (SP)	Service Delivery
2	Long term strategic planning	Sector Strategy	Policy / Strategy	Policy / Strategy	Strategic planning (SA)	Strategic Planning
3	Enhanced stakeholder coordination	--	Sector Coordination	Sector coordination	Sector coordination (SA)	Coordination
4	Realistic financial planning	Sector Financing	Sector Finance	Sector Finance	Financing (SA)	Financing
5	Clear institutional arrangements	Institutional Arrangements	Institutional Arrangements	Institutional Arrangements	--	Institutional Arrangements
6	Better data on inputs, outputs and outcomes	Planning, Monitoring and Review	Performance and Monitoring	Performance and Monitoring	Monitoring (SA)	Monitoring
	--	Capacity Development	--	--	--	--

7	--	--	--	Accountability mechanisms (SP)	Accountability
8	--	--	--		Water Resources
9	--	--	--	Understanding blockages that stand in the way of lasting services (SA)	--
10	--	--	--	Regulation (SA)	--
11	--	--	--	Post implementation support (SP)	--
12	--	--	--	Asset management and replacement (SP)	--

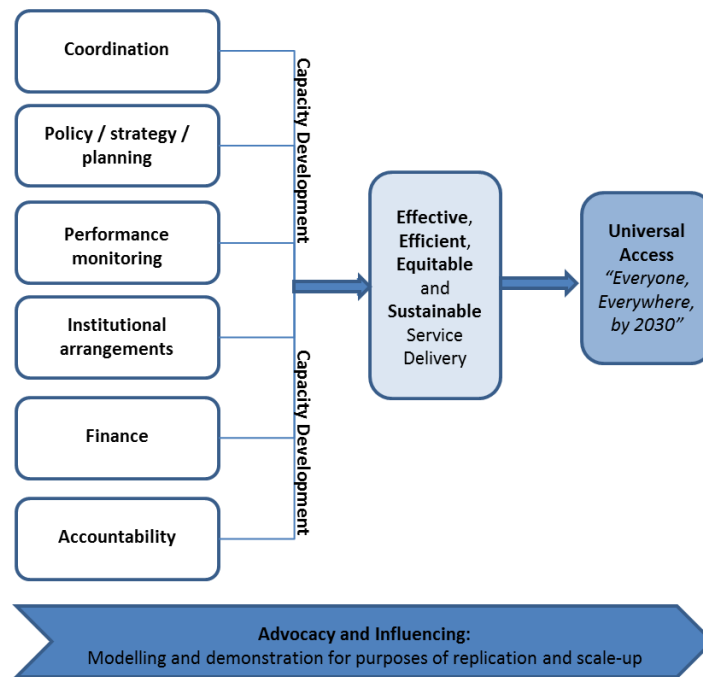


Figure 3. WASH system strengthening for effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable service delivery (developed in collaboration with the WaterAid Ethiopia CP as part of a final debrief workshop)

For case study CPs, KIIs with WA CP staff revealed a broad understanding of sector strengthening, one that only sometimes made direct reference to building blocks (e.g. the ‘what’ of sector strengthening), but also included significant discussion on ways of working, or the ‘how’ of sector strengthening. The latter included mention of working at different levels of governance, as well as stakeholders (State and non-State), advocacy and influencing, learning and demonstration of good practice models and approaches, situational and context analysis, and most



Figure 4. Hierarchy and typology of WaterAid’s key programmatic documentation (From: WaterAid’s Quality Programme Standards, 2018)

commonly, capacity development. While Water Aid documentation appears to focus more on the 'what' of sector strengthening, little guidance currently exists on the 'how' of achieving an effective sector. This was commonly cited as a critical gap by CPs as it relates to the DWA, the need for more simple, clear and concise guidance on how to transition through the different 'states' of the DWA building blocks – from emergency, to fragile, to transitional, to desired¹⁵. Adopting a common definition¹⁶, objective, and approach to sector strengthening, while being clear on where the approach fits within the hierarchy of WaterAid's key programmatic documents (Figure 4) is one way to reconcile, as well as better conceptualise, the core elements of sector strengthening

Despite a lack of consistency across the organisation, CP staff do have a relatively good overall understanding of sector strengthening concepts and approaches. This understanding has clearly developed based on increased levels of support, cross-country information sharing, refinement of tools and on-going experience in the last few years. In addition to this support, staff exposure to a broader spectrum of roles was found to be of great benefit. Two of the Malawi CP staff had worked in a mixture of both advocacy/policy-related roles and programming roles, resulting in a noticeably more comprehensive understanding of the approaches and the linkages between them. Only at lower levels, such as some district and municipal officials, were there occasional indications of a continued service delivery mind set. This, it was suggested by some WaterAid KIIs, is often compounded by poor staff retention, leading to new staff not having been involved in the initial planning and discussions where sector issues, blockages and capacity gaps might be discussed and with the partners.

¹⁵ See WaterAid's Strengthening WASH systems for sustainable services at district level: WaterAid's district sustainability analysis tool. WaterAid, August 2017.

¹⁶ While technically a definition of sector strengthening is included in the Global Strategy 2015-2020 Toolkit for Strengthening Sustainable Services, this definition reads more like an argument for why sector strengthening is important. Definitions for both a 'sector' and 'sector strengthening' appears in a PPT deck showcasing SSfSS programme design tools however it is not clear if these definitions are more broadly known, used, agreed, or understood.

Tools and support to CPs: Internal sector strengthening resources and tools have evolved and been refined since initial sector strengthening workshops were held in 2014. In particular, tool development has been accelerated through the initial design activities of the Sustainable WASH Services at Scale (SuSWASH) Programme (see Figure 7), which has developed a number of tools and participatory exercises¹⁷ which are currently being rolled out to CPs and regions. The coloured building block table of what has now been named the District Sustainability Analysis Tool¹⁸ was the most-mentioned tool by WA CP staff interviewed (55% of global survey respondents deemed the tool 'very useful') and was acknowledged by CP staff as being particularly practical. Context and political analysis tools were also widely mentioned by KIIs at CP level as having been critical inputs into their strategy development process (45% of global survey respondents deemed the PEA tool 'very useful'). In general, while CP staff often struggled to name specific resources, most agreed that they were generally satisfied with the amount of guidance and tools available (82% of global survey respondents suggested they were 'satisfied' with the amount of support, guidance and resources available). Table 6 below includes a summary of the utility of some of WA's key sector strengthening resources. Importantly, the lack of availability of key documents in Spanish was noted as a significant limitation for WA Nicaragua.

"They [available tools] are useful but can be confusing at times given there are too many of these, and the picture may not always be clear".

"While the different efforts are helpful, it is necessary to consolidate the WA approaches and tools further".

"Prepare a comprehensive updated 2018 version of all WaterAid's sector strengthening resources - so new staff know where to go for everything - a kind of toolkit."

"While resources are made available through different channels/mediums, there is need for more guidance through structure[d] orientation such as a workshop and or through integration of sector strengthening into already existing learning groups such as the Healthy Start learning group."

Global survey responses

¹⁷ These include: Willingness and able grid; Unpacking blockages to sustainable service delivery; Ideal sector picture; district level building block analysis; Outcome and output development

¹⁸ Developed in 2017 based on a table first appearing in: Sitali, M. and D. Revell de Waal. 2014. Improving Accountability towards Aid Effectiveness in the Water and Sanitation Sector. Discussion paper prepared by the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) of the World Bank, with the support of Country Processes Task Teams of the SWA. March 2014.

Despite the high levels of satisfaction with sector strengthening guidance, tools and support amongst CP staff, document review results suggest the focus of WaterAid's internal resources in this area is on tools and toolkits (e.g. District Sustainability Analysis Tool, District Monitoring Assessment Tool, Political Economic Analysis Toolkit) However, the guidance documents and frameworks that should both ground and position these tools – introducing and rationalising their development and use – are currently very weak and dispersed. Key sector strengthening concepts and discussion threads are currently hidden in a large, multi-themed compilation of discussion papers and thought pieces used to inform the development of the Global Strategy in 2015¹⁹. Reference to a 'Sector Strengthening Toolkit' in other documents²⁰ would appear to refer to a two-page document on strengthening sustainable services that includes only definitions and some key messages, but no tools²¹. Furthermore, how useful or actionable the key messages and definitions are is arguable as they read as more public-facing literature rather than operational guidance for internal WA staff.

Perhaps some of the most tangible and concrete guidance articulating WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening is provided by two 2017 documents, both of which appear to be underutilised, misunderstood, and somewhat confusing. While WaterAid's "Achieving a step change in sector performance"²² document presents a set of sector building blocks "*essential to building effective sector systems at **national** and **local** levels*", there is no attempt to reconcile differences in district-level building blocks (presented elsewhere in WaterAid literature) with those presented in this document. This document does however offer a useful breakdown of the five building blocks and elaborates core components of each (what have been called sub-building blocks for the purposes of this evaluation), however 36% of global survey respondents were unaware of the resource. WaterAid's flagship theme reference note on "Promoting sustainable services at scale"²³, despite also including good guidance on what is meant by WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening, is considered by Member Country key informants to be a fundraising tool. It was not mentioned by any CP staff despite fundraising staff being included in KIIs. The

¹⁹ Global Strategy 2015 – 2020, Discussion Papers and Thought Pieces (no date).

²⁰ Supporting sustainable services using a DWA: WaterAid's support role and exit strategy, August 2015 (updated April 2017).

²¹ Global Strategy 2015 – 2020 Toolkit: Strengthening sustainable services, (no date).

²² WaterAid. Achieving a step change in sector performance: towards universal access to WASH. Discussion Note, 2017.

²³ WaterAid, 2017. Flagship theme reference note: Promoting sustainable services at scale, last updated March 2017.

confusion inherent in developing and showcasing tools and toolkits without first positioning them within broader organisational frameworks and/or delivery models/approaches (see Figure 4), is apparent in CP staff comments regarding sector strengthening resources. Some CP staff suggested that they require more consolidated and practical guidance that clearly define sector strengthening and specific building blocks and give practical examples of how to achieve each, along with where to access support for areas where they do not have knowledge and capacity. Others suggested that there are too many tools and not enough practical or hands-on support offered.

One area where CPs do not feel they have enough guidance is measuring sector strengthening outcomes. This is evident in many performance measurement frameworks of CPs that have a legacy of service delivery projects, where we see the majority of targets and indicators, even for sector strengthening activities, being quantitative, such as how many people were trained or the number of meetings with coordination bodies.

Although sector strengthening workshops were held in most regions over the 2014-2015 period, four out of the eight case study CPs reported that staff who had originally attended these workshops were no longer with the organisation. Staff provided a number of good recommendations to improve CPs understanding and operationalisation of sector strengthening, from additional workshops, to toolkits and learning groups (see global survey respondent comments, previous page). It is important to note that accountability was not incorporated in the sector strengthening building blocks until 2017, which, given the association between accountability and HRBA, also means there was limited inclusion of HRBA until this time. However, the inclusion of case study countries Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Ethiopia in the HRBA Action Learning Initiative likely gave them increased understanding of HRBA and its role in sector strengthening. Recently, the SuSWASH programme has provided the opportunity for the four participating CPs to have a number of workshops together which have been very well received by CP staff and an excellent opportunity to share experiences and develop a more consistent understanding of sector strengthening.

WaterAid's regional offices are playing a significant role in supporting and building understanding in CPs. A recent The West Africa Regional Management Team meeting focussed almost entirely on sector strengthening, including identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge in key approaches. It is planned to follow up with a similar exercise for less senior staff. In South Asia they formed a Regional Program Group with representatives from each of the CPs and led by three members of the regional team. This group ensures, among other things, that program designs integrate sector strengthening approaches, including HRBAs, and that there is consistency between the CPs.

WaterAid has recently launched Knowledge Net, an online platform allowing global access to a wide variety of internal and external resources ranging from guidelines and frameworks to information on a specific thematic area or subject relating to programme and policy work. It includes a section on sector strengthening which includes key documents, communities of practice, contacts and e-learning and webinar links.

Table 6. Summary of CPs use of key sector strengthening tools based on global survey results (*n* = 11)

DOCUMENT	Not useful <i>(after reviewing the resource, we did not apply any of its content)</i>	Somewhat useful <i>(we used some content/material, but not all)</i>	Moderately useful <i>(we used only that content/material that was most relevant)</i>	Useful <i>(we have integrated most of this resource into our current programmes and projects)</i>	Very useful <i>(we have developed our own tailored approaches based extensively on this material)</i>	Not aware of this resource <i>or, aware of this resource but have not reviewed it in detail</i>	Skipped question / no response
Achieving a Step Change in Sector Performance (March 2017)	-	1	-	4 (36%)	1	4 (36%)	1
Comments [†] : <i>"The resource is not relevant to our context." (1); "We do not fully understand the resource or how it should be applied." (2) "The resource is too complicated or time-consuming to understand / apply." (1); "We use other tools and/or resources that support the same objectives." (1) - no examples provided</i>							
DWA Tool (AKA District Sustainability Analysis Tool)	-	-	1	2	6 (55%)	1	1
Comments [†] : <i>"We do not fully understand the resource or how it should be applied." (1); "We do not have the in-house capacity or resources to apply the tool." (1)</i>							

District Monitoring Assessment Tool (DiMAT)	-	1	3	1	-	4 (36%)	2
Comments †: <i>"We do not fully understand the resource or how it should be applied." (1); "We use other tools and/or resources that support the same objectives." (1) - no examples provided</i>							
Political Economic Analysis (PEA) Toolkit	-	1	1	4		5 (45%)	-
Comments †: <i>"We do not fully understand the resource or how it should be applied." (1); "We use other tools and/or resources that support the same objectives." (2) - no examples provided; "We do not have the in-house capacity or resources to apply the tool." (1)</i>							
Guidelines on integrating a HRBA into WA Programmes (2017)	1	-	1	4		5 (45%)	-
Comments †: <i>"We do not fully understand the resource or how it should be applied." (1); "We use other tools and/or resources that support the same objectives." (1) - no examples provided</i>							
Partnership Toolkit	-	-	-	3		6 (55%)	1
Comments †: <i>None</i>							
Programmatic Approach Paper (2013)	-	1	1	3		5 (45%)	1
Comments †: <i>"The resource is not relevant to our context."; "The resource is too complicated or time-consuming to understand / apply." (1)</i>							



† While respondents were only asked to provide additional comments on resources they scored as either “Not Useful” or only “Somewhat Useful”, some respondents chose to complete this table regardless. As these comments might provide valuable insight into how resources have been received globally, they have been included here for reference.

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CP Strategies and associated CP planning documents: CPs have generally integrated aspects of sector strengthening throughout their strategies and planning documentation. This is evidenced by the fact that all of the case study countries have included at least four (Timor-Leste) and up to eight (Ghana) district and/or national-level building blocks included in their documents, although the actual numbers of building blocks are not possible to objectively determine as so many building blocks are overlapping (e.g. policy on rights or on disability; sector coordination for performance monitoring etc.). The only building block that is clearly not well addressed by case study countries is water resources, which is supported only by Ghana²⁴ and Burkina Faso²⁵. In almost all cases, the building blocks are not explicitly stated by the CP in the language used in WaterAid's global documentation, but the majority of the approaches can be readily associated with a particular building block, and the language used documentation, the KIIs and the activities of the CPs is one of good comprehension of the approach and the reasons for it. This lack of consistency in language, while not without its challenges, (as will be discussed later) does seem to indicate that CPs are not just using sector strengthening language that has been communicated globally, but actually identifying approaches and activities that will lead to achievement of their intended outcomes.

However, the strategies and planning documents often reflect mixed understanding and surprisingly often following very different formats and styles, section heading, language and level of detail. This indicates that there were limited attempts to promote a consistent framework among CPs for the CP Strategy. The same is true for other documents such as Programme Plans and Business Plans.

Following the launch of the Global Strategy in 2015, CPs were expected to integrate the four strategic aims, including sustainable services, into their own CP Strategies. External support during this process included regional workshops on the sector strengthening approach (Southern Africa 2014, South Asia 2014, West Africa 2015 and Australia 2017) along with some webinars. A tool kit including context and sector diagnostic tools and a political analysis tools were

²⁴ Support for Water resources planning was only mentioned briefly in an end of trip workshop by WA Ghana staff

²⁵ Support for water resources was checked in on-line survey by WA Burkina Faso, not mentioned in KIIs

also utilised²⁶. However, when most CP Strategies were developed there were fewer tools available and the consistency and utility of the material was limited. The District Sustainability Tool for example was not available at the time of CP strategy development but since its introduction in 2017, many KIIs confirmed that they had used it effectively and this was confirmed by the global survey where 55% of respondents - the equal highest appreciation for any tool - considered it to be “very useful”.

Many CP and regional staff acknowledge the support given by WAUK PSU and PCD both during and after the development of CP strategies. One Regional Manager commented: *“if you ask for support you almost always get it, its just that many CPs don’t ask”*. This was acknowledged by senior staff in WAUK and WAI who agreed that due to limited capacity, the support to CPs has often been demand led, with the more proactive CPs getting the majority of the direct support.

The language of sector strengthening: CPs use a wide variety of terms to describe their sector strengthening activities. In some countries, “sector governance” is preferred and considered more acceptable by government (e.g. Pakistan and Burkina Faso), whereas WA Ethiopia prefers the use of ‘system development’ or ‘system strengthening’. Importantly, World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance suggests that the term sector (in this case, a health sector) is often interpreted to apply to the actions of government alone. As such, the WHO definition of a “health system” ensures the role and function of both state and non-state actors are considered²⁷. WaterAid could benefit by the introduction of similar definitions and distinctions as evidence of confusion regarding ‘who’ is considered part of the sector clearly emerged.

²⁶ KIIs WAUK-PSU and various CPS

²⁷ WHO, 2010. Monitoring the Building Blocks of Health Systems: A Handbook of Indicators and their Measurement Strategies. World Health Organisation (WHO), Geneva, Switzerland.

Differences in the language around individual building blocks also emerged – reflective of the flexibility of CPs to identify and prioritise those building blocks most relevant, but likely also a result of WaterAid’s own continually changing and evolving internal language (see Table 5). The differing terminology used within and between district-level and national-level building blocks has, according to informants, led to additional confusion. The five national-level building blocks are all present at district level, although they use slightly different terminology (financing/sector financing; monitoring/ performance monitoring etc.) Two others, service delivery and water resources, have understandably been added at the district level as they reflect more field-level activities, however the only two case study CPs actually working on this building block (Burkina Faso and Ghana) are working with national-level governing bodies responsible for integrated water resource management. The absence of accountability in national-level building blocks was contentious for all case study CPs with whom this was discussed in detail (Burkina Faso, Ghana and Ethiopia) as sector accountability at national level forms a core part

HEALTH SECTOR LANGUAGE – FROM WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS’ (WHO) HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING GLOSSARY

Health system: the *people, institutions* and *resources*, arranged together in accordance with established policies, to improve the health of the population they serve, while responding to people’s legitimate expectations and protecting them against the cost of ill-health through a variety of activities whose primary intent is to improve health.

Health systems strengthening: any array of initiatives and strategies that improves *one or more of the functions of the health system* and that leads to better health through improvements in *access, coverage, quality, or efficiency*.

Health system building blocks: an analytical framework used by WHO to describe health systems, disaggregating them into *six core components*: leadership and governance (stewardship), service delivery, health workforce, health information system, medical products, vaccines and technologies, and health system financing.

Health system functions: an analytical framework describing *four key work packages* health systems have to perform: providing services; generating the human and physical resources that make service delivery possible; raising and pooling the resources used to pay for health care; and, the function of stewardship - setting and enforcing the rules of the game and providing strategic direction for all the different actors involved. These functions are performed in the pursuit of *three goals*: health, responsiveness and fair financing.

of many CPs activities. Based on recent descriptions²⁸ of national-level building blocks, accountability is integrated into other building blocks such as institutional arrangements, monitoring and sector coordination. While reasonable justification exists for such integration, confusion and the ability to link between the two may be improved if there was uniformity and consensus. At district level, accountability is a distinct building block and is associated with HRBA, which builds rights holders capacity to make duty bearers accountable.

The varying terminology used is somewhat understandable given the evolution of the thinking and the discussion, which may not always be promptly shared globally. However, it also reflects what many in WaterAid refer to as the “light touch²⁹”, whereby CPs have a significant amount of autonomy. While autonomy is necessary for CPs to ensure their work addresses and reflects the varied and complex situations in each country, the lack of direction and consistency would appear to be contributing to unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding along with less effective and unified communication and knowledge sharing, reporting and monitoring at a global level. Here again, lessons from the WHO and efforts to develop a commonly accepted language as relates to health systems and health systems strengthening are relevant (see side bar, previous page).

Integration of Sector Strengthening: Following the lead of the Global Strategy, many CPs have included sector strengthening as a distinct programmatic area, although they often use different terminology. For example, Pakistan has three programme areas: The Rural WASH Programme, the Urban WASH Programme and the Influencing and Enabling Programme. The Influencing and Enabling Programme, which is essentially the sector strengthening programme, has its own distinct projects, but according to WaterAid Pakistan KIIs, also provides the support necessary for the Rural and Urban Programmes to integrate sector strengthening activities into their two programmes. The Rural Programme, for example states in its Business Plan: *“All the new projects under rural programme will be designed and implemented with built-in components of advocacy, sustainability, and influencing, local leadership and with [influencing and*

²⁸ Such as the “Step Change” document referenced earlier

²⁹ “Light touch” was a term used frequently by WA staff during the inception mission for this evaluation, both during KIIs and the Inception workshop

enabling] lens for further replication in the similar context” and supports this with specific outcomes that focus on “*systems, capacities and coordination mechanisms*” and “*policy & legislative reforms*”.³⁰ WA Cambodia has “*Sector strengthening for universal access in provinces, districts and cities*” as one of its five Strategic Intents (SIs), but the activities that it includes within this are quite tightly defined, which helps to limit confusion about what might be included in this SI relative to other SIs which could also be considered as being sector strengthening approaches. This highlights some confusion evident from KIIs at both global and CP level, of whether sector strengthening, being such a cross-cutting approach, should be a distinct programming area or whether it should be integrated into every activity, project and programme. The current separation creates the impression that it is a stand-alone activity and creates confusion for CPs who have to determine what is and is not sector strengthening and, as was reported by the Ghana CP, undertake the time-consuming and complex operation of pulling-out sector strengthening results from one programme to report on in another.

This identification of sector strengthening as a distinct aim or programme also leads to additional inconsistency and confusion regarding what sector strengthening may or may not include. “Integration” is another strategic aim in the Global Strategy, referring to integration with other sectors such as health, education and nutrition. Working within these sectors is also a major feature of the DWA, which is used by many CPs and is generally considered by them to be one of the foundations of the sector strengthening aim at district level, raising the question of whether integration can be considered part of sector strengthening. Conversely, sector strengthening should also be part of effective and sustainable support to the health, education and nutrition sectors. A similar confusion arises with the distinction between equality – a strategic aim – and the HRBA, which many consider to be something that should be integrated throughout all of the aims including sector strengthening. This was recognised by several key informants and in the global survey where one respondent suggested: “*It will be beneficial to have a holistic WA Programme approach and*

³⁰ Country Programme Business Plan 2016-21, WaterAid Pakistan

defined components, rather than position sector strengthening and HRBA as two approaches people have to struggle with."

Further inconsistency in understanding arises regarding what exactly constitutes the "sector". WA Ghana's Sector Strengthening Programme initially included capacity development of the CP and implementing partners, although this confusion was later resolved. One outcome in WA Malawi's Sector Engagement and Influencing Programme is: "*A vibrant civil society that proactively engages in the WASH sector*". Civil society, and its coordination is an important part of an effective and sustainable WASH sector and this is recognised in WaterAid's Global Strategy, where it is mentioned throughout. WaterAid Malawi and all other case study CPs are providing support to and partnering with civil society groups to pool expertise and resources and engage with them through networking and coordination bodies to share experiences and present a united front to government. In these ways civil society support has had significant success in strengthening the sector through holding all levels of government to account in areas such as WASH financing (e.g. WAGhana), WASH provision to communities (WA Malawi) and WASH access for people with disabilities (WA Cambodia). However, some senior WAUK staff interviewed, were keen that the distinction be made between supporting these groups and "implementing partners", which they felt are often doing work that, under a sector strengthening approach, the government should be supported to do. Similarly, there was some debate within one CP as to whether community groups constitute part of the sector. These examples indicate a lack of clear definition and guidance on some relatively fundamental and foundational aspects of the approach.

3.2. Operationalising of the Sector Strengthening Approach within Country Programmes

This section identifies the process by which CPs have identified key areas, or building blocks, on which they focus their sector strengthening activities, along with discussions and examples of some of the most significant challenges that they have encountered in implementing the approach.

Identification of building blocks and programmatic priorities: CPs indicated that their strategies and programmes were developed to follow Global Strategy priorities while also integrating context, situational and political economy analyses. Review of their key documents found that the objectives relate closely to sector strengthening building blocks, although building block terminology is often not used, mainly due to many CP strategies and programme plans being developed prior to this terminology being finalised or well known.

Although global survey responses suggest the majority of CPs are working on targeted sector strengthening building blocks (73% of respondents indicated they were targeting at minimum six of eight identified building blocks), KIIs conducted as part of case study development revealed a more nuanced understanding of sector strengthening within WaterAid. Global survey responses suggest that with the exception of water resources, most other building blocks (as defined for the purposes of this evaluation, see Section 2.1) are receiving significant attention in CP programming and projects (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Of priority to 100% of survey respondents were the following building blocks: sector policy / strategy / planning; sector coordination (mostly sector working groups and joint sector review processes, 90.9%); and sector finance (mostly budget tracking, 54.5%). The limited number of CPs addressing water resources as a key building block (36.4%) suggests that few CPs are taking a landscape-level approach to service delivery (e.g. by assessing environmental risks to water supplies, including water quality and climate risks). Other significant gaps include WASH sector legal and regulatory framework review , and the independent monitoring of sector plans – each with only 18.2% of respondents working on these issues. Under service delivery, most CPs are still focusing on coverage extension (63.6%), rather than post implementation support (45.5%), suggesting that CPs focus is still more heavily weighted towards pure service delivery rather than more sustainability measures, operations and maintenance, monitoring of services, etc.

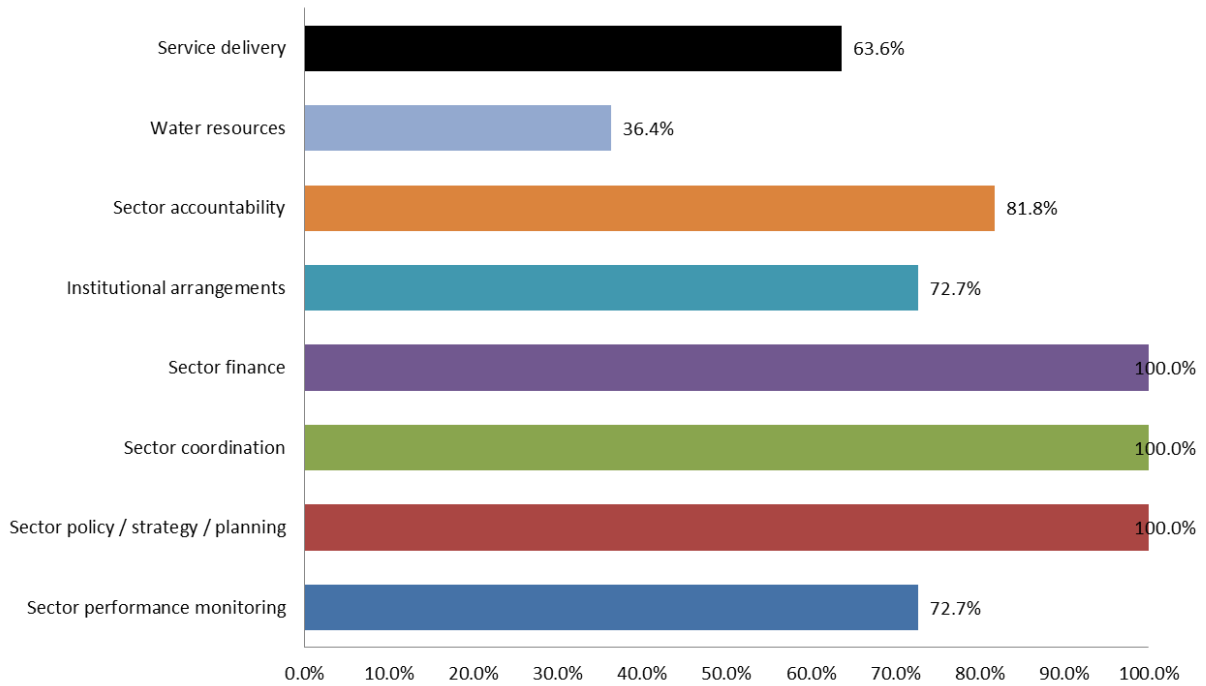
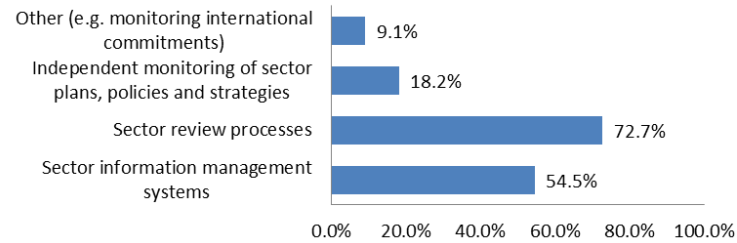


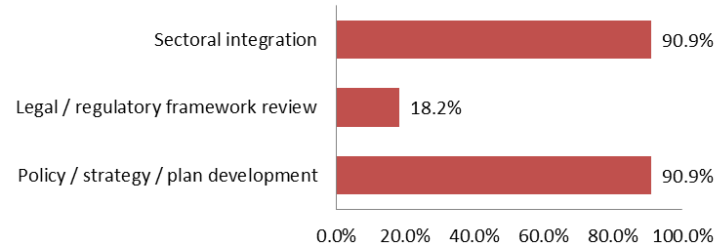
Figure 5. Building blocks of priority focus for CPs (n = 11)³¹

³¹ Please see Limitations 2 and 3 in Section 2.4 when interpreting Figures 4 and 5 and results from the online survey administered as part of this evaluation.

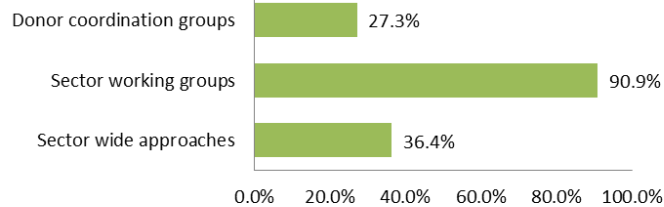
Sector performance monitoring



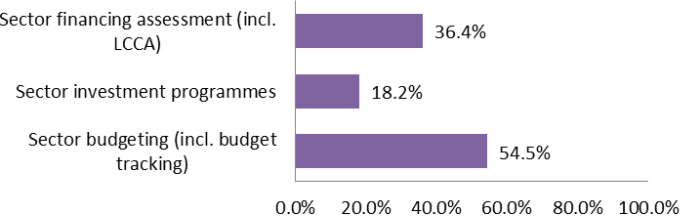
Sector policy / strategy / planning



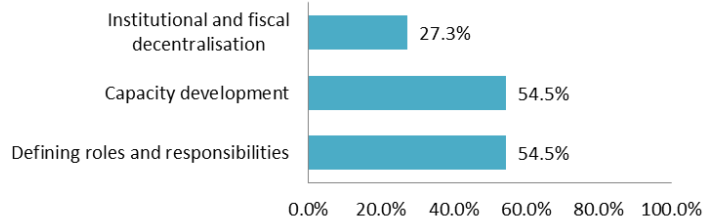
Sector coordination



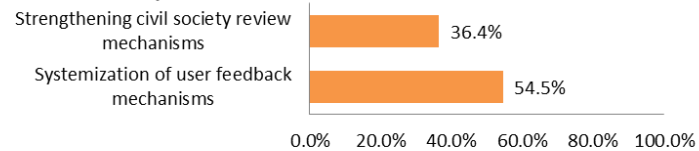
Sector finance



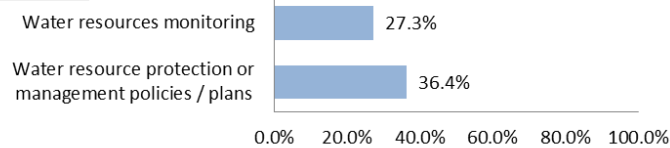
Institutional arrangements



Sector accountability



Water resources



Service delivery



Figure 6. Sub-building blocks of priority focus for CPs (n = 11)

CPS' selection of building blocks has not been based solely on the priority needs identified in the sector. Programming legacy is clearly a factor, with CPs such as Ghana and Malawi, while doing some national sector strengthening work, also building on their previous support of districts through the DWA, onto which they are integrating further elements of sector strengthening and modelling approaches. WA Cambodia, conversely, as a new CP with no legacy, was able - within the constraints of capacity - to focus on the national-level support it considers to be a priority. Other CP priorities are influenced by political or institutional considerations such as the obligation to support the One WASH National Programme in Ethiopia and the high levels of provincial autonomy of the WASH sector in Pakistan. Funding opportunities likely also play a part in a current climate. Many donors still have a strong focus on service delivery projects which, due to the need for funding may contribute to some project designs focussing predominantly on this area.

Based on KIIs with CP staff one of the greatest determinants in their prioritising of building blocks is the level of capacity in the CP. CPs were clear that having moved from a more tightly-defined focus on a service delivery approach, they do not have the full range of skills and experience necessary for supporting all of the priority needs identified. As one staff member in Malawi noted: *"Some areas of sector strengthening people do not know much about, so they ignore them"*.

This lack of internal capacity was recognised by many of the CPs. As one senior staff member in Ghana stated: *"You need a minimum skills package to be able to do sector strengthening"*. Another informant, in WA Pakistan, highlighted how, in countries where the government partners are often well educated and skilled, capacity levels may determine the initial credibility with the government partner: *"The first activity of the CP is to prove that they have the necessary skills to support the government"*. Sector finance and performance monitoring are areas identified by CPs including Cambodia, Malawi and Ghana as priority areas where support is necessary to strengthen the sector, yet, many have clearly not focussed their CP programming on these areas as they have felt limited by their abilities. At a recent SuSWASH workshop³², all four of the programme CPs identified life-cycle costing as a particular deficiency in their capacity. According to one of the SuSWASH team, it is planned to contract this support out (to IRC), which may be an effective response for filling gaps in capacity, especially if is accompanied by some involvement or mentoring of CP team members. CPs have often had increased success in influencing areas such as sector financing and monitoring approaches, which as well as presenting

FIGURE 7
PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES AT SCALE (SUSWASH), FUNDED BY THE H AND M FOUNDATION

Running from 2017 to 2020 in four countries, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Uganda, this is WaterAid's first large-scale multi-country Programme that is focussing entirely on sector strengthening. It will address sustainability challenges through a system-wide approach at three levels of decision making: local, national and global, and includes outcomes related to service delivery models; capacity for planning and budgeting; strengthened accountability mechanisms; improved institutional environment; and global sharing of learning and best practice to influence WASH sector actors.

The programme offers WaterAid the opportunity to develop models for effective sector strengthening approaches to utilise in developing and growing understanding and operationalising of sector strengthening approaches both internally and externally. It may also be used as an opportunity to highlight to donors and governments the benefits of financing and supporting sector strengthening projects. In the shorter term participating WaterAid CPs are appreciating the opportunity develop their sector strengthening capacities through internal and external technical support and engaging and learning from other CPs through experience sharing workshops.

³² SusWASH Programme Review & Learning Workshop, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 20– 23 February 2018

a united front, also allows the sharing of specific skills among the various members.

WaterAid member countries are doing their best to support CPs, but they also have only a small number of people with the skills to provide support and already have a heavy workload. CPs have found a variety of ways to address this. Some have hired consultants to provide additional support. Ghana for example hired a consultant to work on both district and national budget analyses. Others have utilised expertise available from other organisations through forums, CSOs or donor partners. The on-going partnerships of WA Malawi and WA Ethiopia with the British utility companies Thames Water and Yorkshire Water offer an excellent opportunity for specific technical inputs and support, such as life-cycle costing and cost recovery (from tariffs, private sector regulation etc.), and also to support the recent shift towards urban WASH and larger-scale infrastructure, where WaterAid lacks long-term experience.

Service delivery models for purposes of scaling and influencing: Most CPs have a legacy of programming that provides or supports direct service delivery. All CPs have embraced the concept of service delivery being for influencing, or model development to roll-up to a larger scale. Effective examples of this have been seen in almost all case study CPs – from progress towards the adoption of a national ‘WASH for health care facilities’ design standard in Ghana, to the adoption and propagation of a ‘model utilities’ approach throughout Tigray and Oromia regions in Ethiopia, to the Pakistan Approach to Total Sanitation training and roll-out in Punjab Province³³. In Malawi, the waste management model developed through the Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Lilongwe project is gaining interest from other municipalities given the resulting increases in revenue generation experienced by Lilongwe City Council. Perhaps one of the most exciting examples of this, although still in its infancy, is WA Nicaragua’s efforts to develop a demonstration centre for **s**imple, **m**arket-based, **a**ffordable, and **r**epairable **t**echnologies (SMARTechs), a “*space for private sector service providers, WASH technicians, and universities to develop, demonstrate and sell innovative WASH technologies*”³⁴.

³³ WaterAid Cambodia does not work on service delivery

³⁴ WaterAid Nicaragua, 2016, Concept Note to the Latter-Day Saints Charities. November 2016.

Performance Measurement: Informants in many CPs identified the measurement of sector strengthening outcomes as a challenge. They cited primarily the ongoing pressure from donors and government partners to report on user numbers and WASH access, but also the lack of guidance on how to develop effective monitoring frameworks for sector strengthening outcomes. As a result, many CPs have still “*elevated the number of users supported to be the most visible indicator*”³⁵ and quantitative targets for sector strengthening activities such as the number of meetings held, and number of people being trained are used in results frameworks and reports³⁶. While some key informants cited the utility of WaterAid’s Indicator Library, there is currently no tab specifically for sector strengthening indicators, but there is a tab for transformational change. Without supporting guidance on data collection methods for qualitative outcome indicators (e.g. evidence of change in capacity, change in knowledge and awareness, evidence of clear norms and standards for delivery, management and financing of WASH services), this well-intended resource risks becoming obsolete where it is needed the most – supporting project/programme development that achieves a system change.

Working with Government: Sector strengthening necessitates working directly in line and alongside all levels of WASH sector governance in a country – from local to national. Although not without its challenges, this appears to be well recognised and understood across WaterAid CPs. Evidence suggests that all CPs are working alongside government service providers, authorities and agencies through early engagement on project/programme design; alignment with government needs, priorities and processes (e.g. sector monitoring and reporting efforts for example); and building capacity of typically significantly under resourced decentralised government units. However, only a few CPs are directly engaging with governments as active, meaningful partners defined and cemented by MoUs and co-financing arrangements (more about the latter in the proceeding section). Ethiopia presents a unique case where a government adopted sector wide approach mandates all projects, programmes and initiatives to partner directly with government. Early evidence of this model (WA Ethiopia only phased out local NGO partners under their current 2016 – 2020 Country

³⁵ “Towards a Way of Measuring Results and Impact”, WaterAid Global Strategy 2015-2020: Discussion Paper. (p. 130)

³⁶ Examples include: Programme results frameworks for WASH in Communities, WASH in Health and WASH in Education Programmes WaterAid Ghana; and WaterAid Malawi Country Programme Annual Report 2016/2017

Strategy) indicates improved government buy-in, uptake and commitment to sustainability of project successes. One such example is regional governments' own investment in establishing model utilities to increase scale and coverage of an approach introduced by the 20 Towns Project with Yorkshire Water (see Section 3.3 for more details). Although no mention of WaterAid's Partnership Toolkit was made during KIIs and case study development, it is evident that direct partnerships with government units – defined in MoUs that include cost sharing arrangements – are an effective to means to improve the likelihood of sustainable service delivery.

However, as noted above, working directly alongside government is not without its challenges. Some of the key issues related to working with government that were identified in the Global Survey can be seen in Figure 8. Working closely with government partners has generally made progress much slower. As a Programme Manager in WA Pakistan stated, it can take a year just to get a signed MoU with government, and this is then followed by further delays in planning and further consensus building. This was also reiterated by a SuSWASH programme staff member who mentioned that the delays are accentuated by working in a more integrated approach, as agreements are required from a variety of different ministries or departments. This, along with the longer time often needed to achieve sector strengthening results, means that far fewer results can be achieved within the limited timeframes available under most

projects. Also noted was the lack of motivation and the staff turnover associated with government. Many CPs have experienced blockages associated with certain government staff members' failure to undertake basic tasks or approve essential activities, and conversely have trained and supported effective people who are then transferred to another department of district. Various approaches have been tried to address this, such as training and supporting considerably more individuals than immediately necessary and identifying "champions" at various levels, who have both the power and enthusiasm to move things along. However, while providing a medium-term solution, both of these approaches may still be unsustainable in the long term. Another challenge working with government, considered by one Regional Manager to be the main blockage in his region, is the lack of accountability, fraud and mismanagement; something he noted that WaterAid has very little power to address. While WaterAid CP's, including for example, Ghana and Malawi have had some success through HRBA's in addressing accountability of duty-bearers to provide services and in improving management practices, fraud issues may be more difficult to tackle.

FIGURE 8. WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN ROLLING OUT A SECTOR STRENGTHENING APPROACH?

External

Disparate timescales (between government and projects)

Sector leadership conflicts (e.g. between Agriculture, Water and Health Ministries)

High turnover in government leaders and staff

Political changes

Limited capacity at sub-national levels (human and financial)

Donor and aid-based legacies ("government agencies are typically used to a service delivery project where donors provide direct services")

Unfamiliarity with sector strengthening approaches and tools

Lack of funding / financing available for WASH

Internal:

Resource mobilisation for sector strengthening

Limited internal / in-house capacity

Monitoring and reporting on sector strengthening outcomes

Lack of an agreed / consolidated WaterAid approach to sector strengthening

Too many tools; not enough structured guidance

Supporting more effective and transparent budgeting and accounting processes may be their only entry point.

District Financing: Also related to working with government but worthy of separate discussion is the lack of fiscal decentralisation in most, if not all, countries where WaterAid is operational. A global sustainability survey undertaken by WaterAid in 2014 stated that lack of financial sustainability is *"currently the weakest aspect of WaterAid's programmes"*³⁷. CPs, including Ghana and Malawi stated that they regularly finance operational costs that should be the responsibility of government partners, including transport or fuel for monitoring activities, printing of guidelines and manuals that government has developed, and meeting and training costs. While this support was highly appreciated by government stakeholders met as *"government cannot be everywhere"* (KII, Government representative, Burkina Faso), it was also acknowledged as unsustainable by many of WaterAid's CP staff interviewed. An undated District Sustainability Case Study³⁸ for a WA Malawi project made the following recommendation: *"Avoid project funding of any activity or behaviour that is expected to continue after project exit."* This highlights one of the fundamental and critical challenges of working at a district level in poorly decentralised states. There is clearly a need to influence government partners to provide increased WASH budgets that include operational costs. The Sustainability Study of 2014 recommended that CPs carry out full life-cycle cost analysis in partnership with government stakeholders. This has clearly had some impact with CPs including Ghana, and Malawi referencing their support to districts in this, but also, along with other CPs such as Cambodia and Pakistan, noting that they have insufficient skills in this area. WA Ghana addressed this through hiring external consultants (KII WaterAid Ghana). This issue is addressed by Agenda for Change who suggest that there is a *"logical sequence"* whereby some building blocks, such as finance might need to be addressed before others can be effective³⁹. In Nicaragua, where municipal governments must allocate at minimum 7.5% of their state transfer payments towards WASH (the highest of any country studied for purposes of this research), WA Nicaragua staff admitted

³⁷ WaterAid Global survey on sustainability, Overview, 2014

³⁸ WaterAid & Engineers Without Borders: Supporting institutional sustainability to deliver permanent WASH services in Malawi (undated)

³⁹ Agenda for Change, Roadmap for Universal Access to Sustainable WASH Services at District Level, August 2017

to working hard to demonstrate the importance of incorporating operational costs in addition to capital investment as part of this payment.

Co-financing arrangements demonstrate some of the greatest potential in terms of financial sustainability of sector strengthening efforts. In Burkina Faso, as part of the SaniBaKou project, partnership agreements with commune administrations ensured that sanitation technicians hired with project support were retained by commune administrations on a permanent and full-time basis following project closure. By the end of the project, of the seven participating communes from Koulpélogo Province, KIIs suggest that five had retained their sanitation technician on salary by the close of the project (> 70%). In Pakistan, several of WA Pakistan's projects involve the CP providing technical support to government-funded and led projects, often following significant modelling or influencing from WA Pakistan. Examples include the provincial roll-out by the Government of Punjab of the Pakistan Approach to Total Sanitation activities, after WaterAid Pakistan had modelled the approach through the training of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) in each village to engage and mobilise local communities and lead community-level planning for construction of household latrines. The Government of Punjab's funding of a WASH and nutrition project was likewise the result of significant influencing by WA Pakistan. In Ethiopia, the CP has adopted a more systematic approach to cost sharing with government partners as part of their DWA where government partners must contribute 20 – 30% of matching project funds.

Integration of HRBA: HRBA is an important part of the sector strengthening approach in that it provides an opportunity for duty-bearers (usually government but may be the private sector) to be held to account by rights-holders (usually the public or their representatives) to provide and maintain the services as per their mandate. This accountability is necessary at both national and local levels, where its effectiveness necessitates a legal/policy foundation for the right and a strong and well-informed proponent to hold the duty bear to account. WaterAid CPs are addressing this through their programming in a number of ways at both of these levels. WA Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Pakistan and Ghana are working at national and provincial levels to ensure that rights are enshrined in the new national Constitution (Burking Faso), as well as WASH policies and legislation. This is being

done in collaboration with sector working groups and similar, ensuring that there will also be a strong voice to hold government to account on meeting their obligations. Likewise, at local levels, WA CPs are strengthening community groups to demand their WASH rights that are the mandate of the districts. HRBA is, as such – and this is captured in the conceptual model - integrated through many aspects of the sector strengthening approach, including policy (establishing the rights), accountability (holding duty bearer to account), institutional arrangements (building capacity of community groups to demand rights), sector coordination (providing a united front of WASH stakeholders to hold government to account) and sector finance (ensuring duty-bearers are meeting their financial commitments) and service delivery (providing a sustainable WASH service to all, including the most marginalised). As WaterAid’s HRBA was identified as integral to the organisation’s sector strengthening approach (as evidenced in the conceptual model developed by WaterAid staff) and therefore within scope for this evaluation, an analysis and discussion of CPs efforts in this area follows.

As discussed in the Section 3.1, CPs seem to have a good understanding of HRBA, especially those that are part of WaterAid’s HRBA Action Learning Initiative⁴⁰. All CPs have clear references to rights and equality and inclusion within their CP strategies and their programme plans and appear to be very conversant with the issues. CPs are integrating some effective programming into their sector strengthening work at both the local levels and the national levels. At community levels, where many CPs have long-term experience in strengthening community groups, there have been effective initiatives to raise awareness of rights and accountabilities, along with developing and supporting groups such as Citizens’ Forums and Women’s Action Groups; building their confidence and skills and establishing platforms on which they can engage with duty bearers. This focus on strengthening local capacity to demand their rights should lead to increased sustainability of services in the longer term as it will hold duty bearers to account to continue to both provide and maintain services.

In some CPs there have been some initial challenges with the HRBA, including political sensitivities in using the term “rights” in some countries such as Pakistan

⁴⁰ Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Ethiopia

where the CP instead frames the conversation around “equity and accountabilities”, and Ethiopia, where INGOs are prohibited from engaging in human-rights related advocacy. As such the HRBA discussion in Ethiopia is rather framed around “pro-poor approaches” and “accountability”. In other CPs such as WA Malawi there has been some “push-back” from duty-bearers who initially felt threatened by the approaches of rights-holders. Interestingly, this was overcome when the duty-bearers realised that in many cases the right-holders are not always demanding, they just want a conversation or answers. This indicates the importance of working with both the duty-bearers and the rights-holders.

Several CPs have also integrated HRBA and equality programming into their national-level sector strengthening work. As discussed earlier, while this may not provide immediate on-the-ground outcomes, it is an essential foundation for an HRBA approach as it provides the legal framework upon which to hold duty-bearers to account in future HRBA activities. WA Burkina Faso was the leading advocate behind the right of access to water and sanitation as part of the country’s new Constitution, accompanied by tools for mobilising communities to ensure operationalisation and accountability around this right. In Pakistan, the *“Enabling the Legislators for Universal Access to WASH Rights”* project has championed WASH issues, particularly the rights of the most marginalised, to legislators. In Cambodia, WA Cambodia has developed a solid reputation for inclusive WASH and along with others, supported the Ministry of Rural Development to develop guidelines for people with disabilities, and has developed a tool to assess how accessible and female-friendly WASH in healthcare facilities are. This is being disseminated across the health, disability and WASH sectors. WA Nicaragua, working solely in the autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast where government presence is limited, is focused almost exclusively on WASH access for the poorest and most marginalised, including rural, remote, and isolated indigenous populations. The CP is bringing this experience as well as the needs and priorities of these regions to the forefront of national WASH dialogue through their role as Chair of the National Water and Sanitation Network that includes both State and non-State stakeholders⁴¹.

⁴¹ RASNIC, or *Red de Agua y Saneamiento de Nicaragua*.

Private Sector Support: The global growth in private sector involvement in the WASH sector is not well reflected in WaterAid's programming, although it features significantly in the text of the Global Strategy. One regional director stated that private sector involvement is “almost zero” in his region and although private sector partners are mentioned as partners in many WASH forums and working groups, they do not often feature as key partners in CPs' programming. Some effective work in developing opportunities for private sector involvement has been demonstrated in Lilongwe, Malawi, where a legislative and regulatory enabling environment has been built to allow and support the involvement and investment of the private sector companies in municipal WASH and waste services. This model has been well received by the Lilongwe City Council and although in its infancy, the project attracting interest from other municipalities and from other NGOs⁴².

Even in the recently-developed SuSWASH programme there is limited attention given to the private sector. The private sector is mentioned in one of the programme outcomes, but only in reference to accountability. While it is occasionally mentioned in the methodology, there are only very limited activities proposed by WA Cambodia and WA Uganda. This limited focus on the private sector in the Programme is further supported by the report of the recent SuSWASH Programme Review Workshop⁴³, where discussion of private sector-related activities was limited to Uganda's modelling of private sector involvement of school sanitation. It is not clear why there is such limited programming in private sector support, but it may be that CPs do not feel they currently have the capacity – either expertise or time – to address this challenge effectively.

Far longer funding commitments are required to strengthen district governments and municipalities, especially where rapid administrative decentralisation is underway unaccompanied by the necessary fiscal decentralisation

Casey, V. and E. Harvey, 2015. Sustainability: Achievement of WASH Services that Last. In WaterAid Global Strategy 2015 – 2020:

⁴² According to Lilongwe City Council Water for People is interested in replicating the project in Blantyre

⁴³ SusWASH H&M Foundation, Programme Review & Learning Workshop, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 20th February – 23rd February 2018, Draft Report

Resource Mobilisation: WASH systems are complex. As such, strengthening of WASH systems requires both time and flexibility, two qualities which donor-funded projects are not well known for. All CPs researched in this evaluation noted exceptional challenges in mobilising resources for sector strengthening activities, citing that *"sector strengthening can't be projectized"* (KII, WA Ghana). One Country Director even suggested that *"in this time of trying to find ourselves, others are coming"* and that WaterAid's *"technical edge has been compromised with [the increased focus on] sector strengthening"*. Accordingly, they feel they are getting pushed out of spaces where they once dominated and that are becoming increasingly competitive and saturated by more 'fluffy' organisations. Across the board, both technical and finance staff requested support in identifying more progressive, less rigid donors, as well as *"special fundraising skills for sector strengthening"* (Global Survey respondent).

Despite internal commitments to advocate for longer-term funding from donors, beyond five years and towards 10+ year commitments⁴⁴, no evidence of success in this could be found. However, some innovative, systems-oriented partnerships with UK utilities and the H&M Foundation (SuSWASH) have been secured. The support of Yorkshire and Thames Water Utilities in Ethiopia and Malawi respectively is particularly promising as it offers both hands-on technical support along with financial support from organisations that have a first-hand

In this time of trying to find ourselves, others are coming. We're getting pushed out of spaces. Our confidence in our utility gene has really gone down. ... We need to reclaim our engineering origins. ... We were created by engineers but engineers are beginning to feel side-lined. We need to claim this as our strength or we are going to be superseded by the 'fluffy' organisations. Our technical edge has been compromised with [the increased focus on] sector strengthening.

KII, WA CP staff, April 2018

understanding of the need for a systems approach in achieving sector strengthening outcomes. Early evidence from the 20 Towns project in Ethiopia suggests that a total investment of just 2% of infrastructure costs in capacity development efforts (human, system and resource), can leverage an

⁴⁴ Casey, V. and E. Harvey, 2015. Sustainability: Achievement of WASH Services that Last. In WaterAid Global Strategy 2015 – 2020: Discussion Paper and Thought Pieces.

additional five-fold increase in internally generated finances from the utilities themselves.⁴⁵ These are impressive results for a project of relatively short duration, highlighting the effectiveness and efficiency of technical partnerships.

Unrestricted funding has also been used by CPs, most notably Pakistan⁴⁶, to fund sector strengthening initiatives. While unrestricted funds are limited, many sector strengthening initiatives, without high

infrastructure costs associated with service delivery, can be relatively low-budget and can often, as in the case of WA Pakistan's projects, be support for government-funded initiatives, or be the catalyst for leveraging funds from government. An interesting suggestion from one of the global survey respondents was that WaterAid should establish a "*global unrestricted basket fund of sector strengthening initiatives*" This may be an option worth investigating and could involve a competitive process with CPs expected to show how the initiative addresses key sector priorities while also leveraging additional funds.

In addition to developing innovative partnerships, there is also a need for WaterAid to invest time and money in raising awareness and influencing their full range of donors on the importance of sector strengthening approaches. WaterAid's current publicity material still focusses predominantly on service provision and WASH access, in direct contrast to most of what is included in its

Sector strengthening [SS] is not an easy to sell approach therefore not easily funded. Even when it is included in a funding proposal submitted to "traditional donors" in WASH sector it becomes the most questioned section of the proposal. The CP would be better supported with special fundraising skills for SS. It would be also better supported through a global unrestricted basket fund at WA to support local initiatives for SS. Lastly, having a resourceful person in SS who can be based in the CP for a well-planned and defined period can help both the sector and help build the capacity in the CP team.

Global Survey Respondent

⁴⁵ for every £1 GBP invested in capacity development by the project, £5.64 GBP has been leveraged from the utilities themselves, including from town administrations, customers and other local stakeholders.

⁴⁶ Unrestricted funding projects include: City Wide Approach for Improved WASH Services in Tehsil Jatoi; Enabling Legislators for Universal Access to WASH Rights; WASH and Nutrition Project, Government of Punjab

Global Strategy, but according to staff it is currently working to build donor interest in sector strengthening through its global policy and advocacy work.

3.3. Early Signs of Effectiveness

Across its global presence, WaterAid is making significant contributions to a number of exciting sector strengthening outcomes at both national and sub-national levels. Importantly, these contributions are not solely related to progress on building blocks alone (e.g. the 'what' of sector strengthening) but also to the processes and approaches used to effectively contribute to progress on building blocks (e.g. the 'how' of sector strengthening). The latter include processes of advocacy/influencing, human rights-based approaches, partnership, capacity development and alignment / harmonisation.

A number of CP efforts are showing promising results by placing service delivery front and centre (e.g. the goal or objective), while strengthening other key building blocks as a means to achieve this. In Ethiopia, efforts to strengthen municipal WASH service delivery by developing human, system and resource capacities of municipal utilities has secured both buy-in and financial commitments from two regional governments interested in scaling out the capacity development approach used. In Nicaragua, efforts to establish a national SMART WASH Centre aims to showcase appropriate and affordable technologies (particularly targeting isolated, remote and dispersed populations), supported by a comprehensive capacity development package to promote a life-cycle approach to construction and implementation. Using the Technology Applicability Framework⁴⁷, this life-cycle approach consists of, amongst other modules, strengthening both coordination and financial management of the technology. In Malawi, efforts to legalise and regulate private waste and water service providers in Lilongwe are showing signs of cost recovery and financial sustainability. In each of these examples, WaterAid CPs are working hard to

⁴⁷ The Technology Applicability Framework, or TAF, is a decision-support tool used to determine the applicability, scalability and sustainability of various WASH technologies as applied under various contexts. Sustainability is assessed based on six dimensions ((i) social; (ii) economic; (iii) environmental; (iv) institutional and legal; (v) skills and knowhow; and (vi) technological) across three key stakeholder groups ((i) user / buyer; (ii) producer / provider; and (iii) regulator / investor / facilitator). The TAF was developed through the WASHTech action research project of the European Union. For more information, see: <http://www.washtechologies.net/>.

ensure that service delivery is modelled for purposes of both sustainability and scalability.

CPs are also making significant efforts to integrate a stronger focus the HRBA into the WASH sector. In Burkina Faso, efforts to implement and operationalise the country's new Constitution recognising access to water and sanitation as a basic human right, are driving accountability outcomes of both duty-bearers and rights-holders. Evidence of this can be seen in WaterAid Burkina Faso's abundant efforts to sensitise the public to this right (e.g. through large-scale national media and fundraising campaigns, and civil society monitoring of Presidential commitments and activities) as well as the use and promotion of local town hall forums to bring rights-holders and duty-bearers together to ask questions and demand answers. In Pakistan, WASH rights are becoming more accepted and are gradually being introduced into legislation at Provincial and National levels as a result of WA Pakistan's efforts to raise awareness and influence legislators. Likewise, WA Cambodia's support to the Ministry of Rural Development and other stakeholders to develop and endorse the 'National Guidelines on WASH for Persons with a Disability and Older People' also ensures that provisions are in place at the highest levels to create an improved enabling environment that recognises the WASH rights of the poorest and most marginalised. While assessing the ultimate effectiveness of these measures in securing more equitable service delivery for poor and marginalised groups is beyond the scope of this evaluation, such efforts as described here are evidence of attempts to change mindsets and behaviours – critical changes necessary in securing sustainable services for all.

While it is clear that some laudable and impressive sector strengthening outcomes are emerging from CPs, it is not clear that such outcomes are attributable to the strategic shift under the current global strategy. In fact, some CPs suggested that this more systems-oriented approach had started prior to the Global Strategy (e.g. through the introduction of the sustainability framework and approaches such as the DWA) and that the participatory approach to the development of the current Global Strategy presented an opportunity to refocus, prioritise and highlight its importance as a core strategic aim of the organisation. As one key informant suggested, sector strengthening for sustainable services is

"not a shift... [but rather] the degree to which it [a sector strengthening approach] is applied and prioritised has increased over time".⁴⁸ This statement was supported by another CP that insisted a sector strengthening approach had always been central to their 'modus operandi'. Notably, this sentiment was more in relation to the 'how' of sector strengthening than the 'what' of sector strengthening (e.g. working in alignment / harmonisation with government policies, plans and procedures, capacity development, and advocacy / influencing activities). Furthermore, while another CP strongly argued that a sector strengthening approach did indeed represent a significant shift for their CP, Evaluators note the likely influence of other weighty and concurrent shifts in the CPs operating environment (e.g. in partnership models and funding structures amongst others) that likely contributed to such sentiments. Such conflicting opinions on sector strengthening as a strategic shift to improve sustainability of services or not could suggest that the early evidence of effectiveness summarised above may actually be the result of a far more complex narrative influenced by longstanding relationships in-country, changes in context and enabling environment, and international credibility and reputation, as described further below.

In achieving sector strengthening outcomes, it is also important to recognise the significance of WaterAid's strong reputation and credibility in all CPs studied. Evidence suggests that this has directly translated into opportunities to influence national policies, strategies and guidelines by capitalising on WASH sector opportunities arising from changes in the political landscape, as well as by leveraging their position as a highly respected INGO in the sector. This is best exemplified by cases in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso where new directives (Ethiopia) and new governments (Burkina Faso) have provided the entry points necessary to (i) pilot new partnership models that work directly with government duty-bearers; and (ii) leverage a new Constitution to recognise access to water and sanitation as a basic human right, thus providing a foothold for both mobilising public interest and holding government service providers accountable for delivering and maintaining WASH services. Capitalising on such opportunities would not have been possible without WaterAid CPs' credibility and reputation in the sector, which has contributed to its successes at national level through its

⁴⁸ KII, WA CP staff, April 2018.

ability to lead and collaborate with other stakeholders to support or influence government⁴⁹. Significant national sanitation budget commitments were recently achieved in Ghana in this way, as was an agreement from all stakeholders, facilitated by WA Cambodia, around the contentious subject of sanitation subsidies in Cambodia.

As can be seen from the examples described above, there have been some impressive results from CPs. These results have often been achieved without CPs having a particularly structured, or clearly defined approach to sector strengthening and, as discussed earlier, sometimes without the full range of skills required. These early signs of effectiveness in sector strengthening suggest that with more structured and focused support even more may be achieved. This would include a well-articulated and comprehensive picture of an effective, efficient and sustainable WASH system for CPs to customise based on their own context and priorities and providing clarity on the integration of HRBA. Such a systems map (or theory of change, or conceptual model) must be supported by clear, simple guidance to define, diagnose, ensure sustainability and monitor progress towards each component of the system. The identification of core performance indicators for each component would also help WA better aggregate country-level results upwards in order to report out on global level sector strengthening results.

3.4. Relevance

WaterAid's sector strengthening approach, was developed as a direct response to the ambitious goals of the SDG's and makes reference to this in its title: *Everyone Everywhere 2030*. WaterAid and other similar organisations recognised that collaboration is essential in meeting the SDG WASH targets and in 2015 launched Agenda for Change (A4C)⁵⁰. A4C brought together WaterAid, Water for People and IRC to develop an agreement and a roadmap⁵¹ for the "fundamental change" necessary in the sector if the SDG goals are to be met.

⁴⁹ As evidenced by WA's lead role in a number of national, multi-stakeholder, WASH working groups (RASNIC, Nicaragua; National Technical Working Group on Sanitation, Ghana) as well as NGO/CSO networks including, SPONG (Burkina Faso), PN-BESITL (Timor Leste), and CONIWAS (Ghana), RuSH, (Cambodia).

⁵⁰ An Agenda for Change: Achieving Universal Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) by 2030, 2016

⁵¹ Agenda for Change, Roadmap for Universal Access to Sustainable WASH Services at District Level, August 2017

The changes agreed upon included a system-wide approach that includes policy, financing, institutions and other key building blocks of the WASH sector, and key principles at global, national and district levels. Its global principles ensured further alignment with other global WASH actors and strategies through linking itself to the wider aid effectiveness agenda included within the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership, and its recognition of access to sustainable WASH services, as a fundamental human right, as stated by the UN. At district level the A4C, is aligned with WaterAid's approaches, the "Roadmap⁵²" stating that it *"takes the district level as its entry point of scale, with the goal of achieving universal and sustained access across the district"* and that *"working at the district level allows approaches to be developed within the overall national framework, with successes brought to the national level to replicate best practice."* These agreed approaches of the A4C partners offer a great opportunity for WaterAid and its A4C partners to, not only streamline their approaches, but work more closely in sharing expertise and partnering to maximise competitive advantage.

Further global relevance is achieved through WaterAid's (and A4C's) membership of SWA. SWA was established in 2009 as *"a global partnership of country governments, private sector and civil society organisations, external support agencies, research and learning institutions and other development partners working together to catalyse political leadership and action, improve accountability and use scarce resources more effectively. Partners work towards a common vision of sanitation, hygiene and water for all, always and everywhere⁵³."* The SWA, with considerable involvement from WaterAid, developed four "Collaborative Behaviours" which have been integrated into the conceptual model shown in Figure 1. It additionally identifies and describes five building blocks that it considers to be *"fundamental components of a well performing sector"*. These are almost the same as WaterAid's national-level building blocks, except that they specifically include "Capacity Development" which WaterAid integrates into its "Institutional Arrangements" building block (see Table 5 for clear differences). SWA's building blocks fail to include sector

⁵² WaterAid was involved in the development of the A4C Roadmap

⁵³ SWA website: <http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/about/>

coordination, primarily because the World Bank argued that coordination should be part of institutional arrangements rather than a stand-alone block.

Robust evidence suggests that the sector strengthening efforts of WaterAid CPs are highly relevant to WASH sector priorities at both national and sub-national levels. At all levels of governance, key informants all felt confident that WaterAid's efforts were directly in line and supporting their WASH objectives⁵⁴. In one case, the relationship between WaterAid and a regional-level WASH authority was described as a "*perfect collaboration*" where the regions internal systems and procedures were respected in a highly consultative manner.⁵⁵ It is apparent that national context analyses were completed as a key input in the design and development of all WaterAid CP Strategies included in this research. In the case of one CP, WA Ethiopia also completes an annual update to its context analysis in order to inform annual plans and activities.⁵⁶

The relevance of WaterAid's sector strengthening efforts at national-level are best exemplified by evidence from the case studies of the breadth and number of key WASH sector policies, plans and strategies in which CPs have had significant input. In many cases, WaterAid CPs have been asked directly by government to input into such documents, or to support consultation processes either technically or financially – evidence of their credibility and reputation as a leading voice in WASH sector dialogue. In other cases, CPs have successfully leveraged their participation in national-level NGO forums, platforms and coalitions to lead or support unified messaging from civil society through advocacy efforts. Some commendable examples of CPs efforts to inform and influence national government priorities include, but are not limited to:

- Burkina Faso's new Bill of Rights, as recognised under the new Constitution (final draft, December 2017; expected to go to constitutional referendum this year)
- Nicaragua's National Agenda for Universal and Permanent Access to WASH by 2030, policy white paper

⁵⁴ KII, Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity (Ethiopia); KII, Ministère de l'Eau et de l'Assainissement (Burkina Faso); Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (Ghana); and KII the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development Malawi

⁵⁵ WABF. See case study for more information.

⁵⁶ KII, WA CP staff, Ethiopia.

- Ethiopia's National Water Policy and Strategy (updates currently ongoing, expected end of April 2018)⁵⁷ and National WASH in Schools Strategy and Implementation Guideline (launched March 2018);
- Malawi's Health Sector Strategic Plan and School Health and Nutrition Strategy
- Cambodia's National Action Plan for Rural WASH and National Guidelines on WASH for Persons with Disabilities and Older People; and its leading the development of the National Subsidy Guiding Principles
- Timor Leste's National Water Supply Policy (2016)
- Pakistan's inclusion of rights-based language into recently approved policies at both National and Provincial levels
- Ghana's adoption of WASH in its SDG indicators for health care facilities

While contribution to policies are not the end goal, they do provide the foundation on which to build a strong and sustainable sector, and the breadth of these policies – including rights, health care facilities, people with disabilities – ensures that this policy foundation will also ensure accountability to provide for the needs of the poorest and the marginalised.

At sub-national levels, although understood differently across CPs (see Section 3.1), the DWA appears to be highly relevant given significant decentralisation challenges cited and observed in all case study countries, and as noted earlier there is recognition of this in the A4C agreement. Through the DWA, WaterAid recognises the importance of effective decentralisation in ensuring that everyone has access to affordable, sustainable services. WaterAid also recognises that in most, if not all, countries where WaterAid works, *"[d]ecentralisation of authority from national to local government level is rarely matched with decentralisation of finance or capacity."*⁵⁸ This was confirmed to be the case in all case study countries, where the status of decentralisation efforts ranged from relatively new (Timor Leste in 2017; Cambodia on-going), to still young but having completed their first strategy of decentralisation reform (Burkina Faso's Strategy for Decentralisation Reform, 2006 – 2015). As a result, WaterAid's programmatic approach also appears to be highly relevant in strengthening sustainable

⁵⁷ KII Director, Research and Development, Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy (MoWIE). 10th April 2018.

⁵⁸ WaterAid, 2017. Supporting sustainable services using a District Wide Approach: WaterAid's support role and exit strategy. Paper prepared by Casey, V., Battle, C., Northover, H. and E. Harvey, August 2015 (revised April 2017).

services by *"demonstrating best practice in sustainable service delivery, [and using this] to influence policy at local, national, regional and international levels."*⁵⁹

On the ground, WaterAid's district-wide and programmatic approaches are strengthening both decentralised institutions and systems, and there is strong supporting evidence for the relevance of these approaches in countries experiencing significant decentralisation challenges. Institutionally, almost all projects reviewed and/or visited, worked in partnership with local/municipal government service authorities and providers with the objective of strengthening institutions' ability to meet their mandate. These included, but were not limited to, commune-level service technicians (Burkina Faso); municipal and regional WASH units (Nicaragua); district WASH teams (Ghana, Timor-Leste) and support to municipal authorities to manage and regulate private (Malawi) and community (Pakistan) involvement in municipal WASH services. In some cases, partnerships and collaborations with CSOs have helped to strengthen and provide more localised – and likely sustainable – accountability of decentralised systems. In Malawi for example, WaterAid works with the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), which helps communities to understand their rights and how the planning processes work so that they can engage in them effectively. They often work with Citizens' Forums and with Women's Action Groups at community and district levels, using a holistic approach to HRBA that is not restricted to WASH but empowers communities to engage with duty bearers on many issues.

WaterAid is also working within existing decentralised systems for purposes of strengthening and influencing its effectiveness and sustainability. Noteworthy examples of this emerged from Nicaragua, where WaterAid is working with municipal WASH units to demonstrate the importance of including operational costs in their WASH-earmarked State transfer payments⁶⁰ ; Ethiopia, where WaterAid is working closely with towns and woreda's to develop their One WASH Plans under and in line with the national directives; and Ghana, where WaterAid is supporting districts to undertake WASH budget tracking and to use a life-cycle analysis approach to their budgeting, which will be used to influence the districts

⁵⁹ WaterAid, no date. Strengthening Sustainable Services: Global Strategy 2015 – 2020 Toolkit.

⁶⁰ In Nicaragua, municipalities are obligated to allocate a minimum of 7.5% of their State transfer payment to WASH related expenditure. Historically, municipalities have tended to focus this contribution on capital costs. See WA Nicaragua case study for more information.

in their WASH planning and to influence national budgeting and transfers to the districts. In Ethiopia, WaterAid is using the sector strengthening building blocks to ensure that local plans sufficiently outline the necessary coordination mechanisms, institutional arrangements, monitoring systems, accountability measures and financing arrangements to support the effective implementation of these plans. WA Malawi's successful assistance in establishing an enabling legal and policy environment for the private sector involvement in waste management and WASH at municipal levels may be seen as model for others in utilising WaterAid's competitive advantage to further engage the private sector as per their Global Strategy and SWA and A4C commitments.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Summary Conclusions

Understanding of 'sector strengthening' across WaterAid is good but diverse and broadly reflects both the 'what' of sector strengthening (e.g. building blocks) as well as the 'how' of sector strengthening (e.g. capacity development, advocacy/influence, partnership models). Many CPs were already integrating elements of sector strengthening into their programming prior to the current Global Strategy so there were already areas where they had considerable understanding and skills. However, since the "strategic shift" of the Global Strategy, CPs' understanding has been developed and built through a range of support at global and regional levels including sector strengthening workshops, hands-on technical support, webinars, tools, and guidance materials. This has translated into increased integration of sector strengthening approaches and activities into CPs WASH programming and some successful outcomes.

However, there is also a lack of consistency and systematic cohesiveness across the organisation as to what constitutes sector strengthening, how it should be integrated into CPs' programmes and how performance should be measured. The relatively rapid and iterative evolution of this "step change" has resulted in a diversity of terms and definitions being used through the evolving explanatory materials. This coupled with an absence of direction in complex and challenging area of sector strengthening performance measurement, and the lack of standardised frameworks has led to significant confusion and a lack of uniformity of approach that potentially impacts project design and implementation and limits WaterAid's ability to initiate an effective global reporting and monitoring system for its sector strengthening work.

HRBA, which has been developed over a similar timescale to the sector strengthening approach, is being implemented successfully at various levels by CPs. However, it has been developed quite independently and "championed" by different people within the organisation, so there is currently a diverse understanding of where it fits within sector strengthening. There is also some lack of clarity relating to the relationship between HRBA and WaterAid's "equality" strategic aim. A similar confusion exists among some CPs around how sector

strengthening approaches might be used within the other strategic aims “integration” and “hygiene”.

Despite the short timeframe since the change in approach and the inconsistencies in the understanding mentioned above, CPs have made significant and commendable progress in integrating concrete sector strengthening activities into their programming and project implementation. However, these are often not chosen or implemented following a robust theory of change or on the most pressing needs in the sector. CPs’ choice of focus has been determined based on a variety of factors including analyses of sector priorities, legacy of the CP and specific skills and capacity within the CP. All but one of the case study CPs focus their support primarily on district/city/provincial-level service delivery, which they use for modelling innovative approaches such as DWA, standard health facility WASH provision or influencing changes in aspects such as government funding and guidelines. There have also been some encouraging examples of wider replication, but these are isolated and constrained by a lack of financial commitment by government. In many districts the lack of financial resources has been highlighted as a major constraint which necessitates CPs providing operating costs for the duration of the project, making sustainability of activities unlikely.

All CPs are to some extent working with various levels of government to support the development of improved WASH policies and strategies and to advocate for increased and targeted sector finance. Cambodia, as a new CP, without the constraints presented by legacy of an existing programme and team, is focussing almost entirely on these areas. Its initial successes, as has been the case for all CPs to some extent, have been enhanced through developing improved sector forums or platforms allowing a more unified and collaborative approach to working with government.

Private sector support has been limited, but there have been isolated successes, such as supporting private sector engagement at municipal levels and community level engagement through promoting and showcasing private sector WASH technology and service provision. For example, WA Malawi’s work supporting a large municipality to develop legal and policy instruments has created an enabling environment allowing private sector involvement, resulting

in improved, cost-recovery-focussed services for water and sanitation and waste management. WA Malawi's support has led to an effective legal and regulatory framework and associated coordinating bodies, enabling functioning water kiosks, public latrines and waste management collection and sorting.

Given the change of focus necessary when shifting to a sector strengthening approach, many CPs have found that they are lacking the skills and capacity to support certain priority needs and have limited resources to make significant staffing changes. There has been ongoing global support from WaterAid, but this is also constrained by availability and resources. CPs and WaterAid globally have successfully filled specific gaps in their capacity, through engaging consultants and partnering with other organisations such as UK-based utilities.

The measurement of sector strengthening outcomes has presented a significant challenge to CPs who feel that they have had limited guidance in how to develop and measure the more complex indicators and targets inherent in sector strengthening. Pressure from traditionally-minded donors who have little exposure to the sector strengthening approach has also been a challenge in that they require access related outcome measurement and they do not fund projects for the longer timeframe required to achieve sector strengthening outcomes.

There have already been considerable signs of effectiveness from CPs' sector strengthening activities. It is not clear however that such outcomes are completely attributable to the strategic shift under the current Global Strategy or a systematic WaterAid approach to sector strengthening. Rather many of the successful sector strengthening outcomes appear to result from CPs focussing and adapting existing areas of expertise and experience and leveraging their existing credibility to work more closely in supporting and collaborating with sector partners. Given the initial signs of success it is likely that more structured guidance and support to CPs on sector strengthening will result in more targeted, logically-sequenced initiatives that both utilise CPs' competitive advantages and develop strategic partnerships to attain sustainable sector strengthening outcomes.

WaterAid's focus on a sector strengthening approach is extremely relevant at global, national and local levels. The approach was developed to specifically

address the challenges associated with meeting the global SDGs and are closely aligned with global WASH collaborations including the SWA and A4C. Sector strengthening in CPs appear to be strongly aligned with national WASH sector priorities and work closely to support and partner with the appropriate government agencies. In most countries, WaterAid is well respected by its government partners and has influenced a number of key national-level WASH sector policies, plans, and strategies. At sub-national levels, through the DWA, CPs are working alongside decentralised institutions and within existing community-based systems to strengthen capacities – human, system and resource – to deliver affordable and sustainable services.

4.2. Recommendations

Defining and Framing Sector Strengthening

- a) **Clearly establish and define what is sector strengthening for sustainable services and where/how does it fit within WaterAid's other ways of working:** Significant internal confusion exists as to whether or not sector strengthening is an objective under the sustainable services strategic aim of the Global Strategy, a country-level programmatic area, a complementary workstream to the HRBA in applying the programmatic approach, or a set of building blocks (district-wide, or not). Sector strengthening for sustainable services needs a clear and consistent definition, approach and articulation of its position in relation to WaterAid's other core approaches – including the programmatic, human rights based, and district wide approaches. Some of the most promising evidence of sector strengthening outcomes are emerging where CPs have placed WaterAid's roots in engineering and WASH technologies at the core of efforts to showcase and model effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable service delivery models. Strong consideration must be given to the role and weight of service delivery in defining WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening.
- b) Related to the above, **establish a formal sector strengthening working group or task team to develop core organisational documentation on sector strengthening:** While WA is demonstrating some strong sector strengthening results, such results could be more consistently and more effectively achieved across the organisation by being more strategic and systematic. Once there is an agreed definition of what is sector strengthening for sustainable services (see recommendation above), consolidating the various tools, guidelines, discussion papers and “think pieces” into a single, harmonised and agreed sector strengthening approach, guideline or toolkit as per WaterAid International's hierarchy of key programmatic documentation would help promote more consistent understanding, and operationalisation of SS efforts across the organisation. Such a remit would appear to fit well within the Terms of Reference for the Global Programme and Advocacy Executive of WaterAid International.

Specific recommendations for inclusion in the Terms of Reference for such a working group/task team, in order to address both recommendations a) and b) here, may include the development of the following, available in each English, French and Spanish:

- Clear **definitions** of 'WASH system' and 'sector strengthening' in line with global definitions used by SWA and A4C;
- A **theory of change** or **consolidated conceptual model** articulating what is sector strengthening. Two such models are presented in this report (Figure 1 and Figure 3) for further consideration and deliberation. Critical to the final model will be a clear and concise identification of both the '**what**' and the '**how**' of sector strengthening:
 - '**What**' are the essential functions of an effective WASH sector (e.g. now commonly referred to as 'building blocks') – including guidance on how such functions might differ between national and sub-national levels, as well as a proposed logical sequencing of building blocks (see Recommendation #2 below).
 - '**How**' can CPs and partners work together to achieve the desired state of each function (e.g. approaches such as through partnership models, advocacy/influence, capacity development, HRBA etc).
- **Minimum standards**, such as WaterAid's Programme Quality Standards for the design and integration of sector strengthening activities into programmes and projects
- Detailed **capacity / needs assessment guidance** to accommodate the diagnostic capabilities of WaterAid's District Sustainability Analysis Tool. Such guidance should serve to support CPs in the identification of capacities (human, system and resource) required to help move the sector towards the desired state.
- **Detailed guidance on how to plan and monitor** sector strengthening efforts including sample outcome indicators with supporting guidance on data collection and monitoring methods for each.
- An **online library / repository of sector strengthening resources** – both internal and external – clearly distinguishing core WaterAid documentation from supporting documentation and including contact information for support personnel and technical advisors. The newly initiated Knowledge Net would be an ideal location to house such a

platform, with measures in place to ensure the library remains current and up-to-date.

- A **global launch initiative** including regional events and **online training modules** developed and available through WaterAid's Learning Hub.

- c) **Develop a critical path, or logical sequence, for sector strengthening building blocks:** Evidence from this evaluation suggests that there are clearly occasions where blockages to one building block must first be unlocked in order to successfully tackle another. Sector finance, at both district and national levels, is a common bottleneck prohibiting progress in other areas (e.g. developing a harmonised sector information management system, where most national WASH systems are currently lagging, for example). Sector finance however may be unlocked by having a comprehensive national WASH strategy, policy and investment plan in place first. An adaptation of the District Sustainability Tool may offer the opportunity to integrate a stop/go system whereby support for certain building blocks (e.g. district level monitoring) is determined by the level of progress on others (e.g. appropriate level of funding to district level and functional monitoring system at district and national level). This need for a critical path is in line with global efforts by the A4C to outline a “logical sequence” to WASH sector building blocks.

Financing Sector Strengthening

- d) **Build cost-sharing arrangements into all partnership agreements and Memorandums of Understanding with government bodies:** Adopting a sector strengthening approach requires a long-term systems approach that supports service authorities and providers (e.g. government partners) to plan beyond the timescale of a single project. Water Aid is achieving impressive and sustainable sector strengthening results where co-financing arrangements have been put in place. If the government partner does not have a sustainable source for the necessary funds, then the initial focus of CP's support should be on supporting government to identify and resolve the bottlenecks in mobilising an adequate and sustainable operational budget, whether

internally or externally, and strengthen accountability mechanisms through approaches such as HRBA and WASH sector coordination bodies.

- e) **Prioritise and broaden partnerships with innovative, flexible and technical donors and supporters, including private sector:** Sector strengthening is broad, complex, and requires an iterative approach to learning. This creates challenges in both its articulation and merits, resulting in challenges in attracting funds. Some of the most impactful sector strengthening results are currently emerging from funding agreements with utilities (Thames and Yorkshire Water in Malawi and Ethiopia respectively) and potentially, flexible foundations open to including learning outcomes in programme design (H&M Foundation SuSWASH). Utility companies and similar industry partners understand the urban WASH sector from a systems perspective and subsequently appreciate the need for a focus on long-term outcomes. Along with their financial support for activities that will ultimately help achieve such long-term outcomes, their technical support fills gaps in CP capacity in areas such as financial planning and tariff setting, performance measurement and monitoring, and citizen accountability for urban utilities. WaterAid may want to consider investing in high quality outreach packages to other utilities in UK and other countries, where successful initiatives from Ethiopia and Malawi are showcased to facilitate further support to other CP programmes. Other donors with the flexibility to build in learning objectives and demonstration models for purposes of scaling and multiplier effects should also be considered of strategic interest. Support to the private sector has received little attention from WaterAid CPs, but offers an opportunity to broaden the partners involved in creating a strong sector and offering further opportunity for sustainability through cost-recovery opportunities and the efficiencies often inherent in the private sector involvement. Activities such as creating an enabling policy and legislative environment for the private sector, as successfully undertaken by WA Malawi, may offer a good model and entry-point for other CPs.
- f) **Consider establishing a competitive basket fund for CPs to support sector strengthening initiatives in-country using internal unrestricted**

resources: WaterAid's shift to a sector strengthening approach appears to have come at a time when the organisation was experiencing some significant organisational changes, including a shift from more unrestricted to restricted funding streams. The two shifts appear not to be compatible given the disparate timescales typical of projects versus that required to achieve optimal sector strengthening results, as well as the disinterest and/or misunderstanding noted by KIIs of some donors in financing activities labelled as sector strengthening. An internal pool of funding available to CPs to either bridge sector strengthening activities from one project to another, or to leverage promising project-based sector strengthening results in need of additional support to scale-up or out, is recommended. While unrestricted funds currently received by CPs are limited, CPs could consider prioritising some of these funds to 'piggyback' sector strengthening activities on other, large-scale infrastructure projects ongoing in-county, as is currently being done by WA Pakistan. Evidence from Ethiopia suggests that by investing even a small proportion of infrastructure costs into capacity development efforts, say, can have significant multiplier effects.

Capacity for Sector Strengthening

g) **Increase WaterAid's internal capacity and its ability to access external expertise to achieve sector strengthening goals:** CPs and WaterAid members often do not have the internal capacity for effectively supporting all the sector strengthening building blocks that might be identified as a priority. To address this WaterAid should consider the following recommendations:

- Once WaterAid's approach to sector strengthening has been clearly defined, articulated, and positioned within the organisations' other existing approaches, **a capacity/needs assessment** should be undertaken at global level to identify capacity gaps as they relate to the adopted approach or model. This assessment will identify the most significant capacity gaps and enable WaterAid to prioritise and make strategic decisions regarding new hires to further support global sector strengthening activities.
- **Establish CP, regional and global mentors.** Based on the above capacity assessment, WaterAid may want to maximise the effectiveness of its

expertise through establishing roaming mentors and specialists based at CP, regional or global level who can offer CPs access to specific sector strengthening skills. This will necessitate having a regularly updated list of global staff with specific technical skills, and ensuring they have the appropriate mandate and time availability to support others.

- **Develop more strategic partnerships and collaborations with others who have complementary skills, resources and experience:** WaterAid's previous focus on predominantly rural WASH means that it has limited experience and capacity in some areas such as urban environments, private sector involvement etc. Continuing to develop long-term relationships with organisations, such as civil society and utilities, that can provide long-term technical support, is one way to do this. Further inroads should also be made to utilise its competitive advantage to engage with others, such as multilaterals or governments, that have the budget and the technical expertise to implement large-scale infrastructure projects.
- **Develop arrangements to share expertise within WaterAid and** with other stakeholders through networking groups and forums, where members may have differing skill sets. Opportunities such as currently in the SuSWASH programme should be exploited wherever possible to bring CPs together to share experiences and skills.