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PUBLISHER

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VERSION

VoR (Version of Record)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Sarkodie, Yaw A., and Emmanuel Addai. 2019. "Making Use of Available Water and Sanitation Data Through Independent Monitoring Programmes". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/29539>.

34th WEDC International Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2009

**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MULTISECTORAL APPROACHES**

**Making use of available water and sanitation data
through independent monitoring platforms**

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REVIEWED PAPER 374

Monitoring of water and sanitation activities and progress in some countries often fails to provide data/information to accelerate decision on sector investments, resource allocation, relevant policy framework among others. The UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme, in its efforts to support countries to strengthen monitoring, sought budget support from the EU in 2006 to pilot a project to help make better use of available sector data in Africa. The project aims to minimize the challenges associated with reliable data on WASH, so that available data can effectively support decision-making. The aim of the project is to assemble, analyse, re-package and disseminate relevant WASH data at regular intervals. Three monitoring platforms have been established in Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria, all of which have started yielding outcomes that are worthy of sharing with stakeholders.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to share lessons from a project that aims to improve Water and Sanitation Sector (WASH) monitoring through the establishment of independent Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring Platforms (WSMP) whose ultimate objective is to help stakeholders make effective use of available WASH sector data in order to accelerate decisions on delivery of drinking water and improved sanitation.

Prevailing data situation in some African countries

Accurate and reliable WASH data/information are not readily available to support effective and timely decision-making in many African countries. Generally, data streams are not harmonized and data literacy across the sector is low. Different institutions, both local and international, provide different data on water and sanitation as a result of different definitions and indicators.

Many potential Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector data users also do not understand the methodologies and definitions used in generating these data and sometimes the purpose for which particular data sets were generated. Data users are therefore generally open to making uninformed choice of data for planning and other purposes.

Apparently, there is need to reconcile global and national reported data. This could be done through appropriate analysis and interpretation in order to help users to make informed choices of data for the intended use through facilitation of harmonization of water and sanitation sector definitions and the creation of common understanding of different data collection methods.

Though some WASH sector institutions including sector ministries have monitoring units, their roles hardly include dissemination of data to all interested users, as well as analysing possible data disparities between their respective institutions and other sector institutions. In many cases, their roles have focused on operational purposes for their respective institutions.

It is in an attempt to minimize these monitoring gaps in the WASH sector that the Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring Platforms (WSMP) have been established in Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria.

Establishment of WSMP

The UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme for water supply and sanitation started planning to support some developing countries to set up single units to serve as one stop centres for data on water and sanitation since 2006. This move was to pilot a JMP technical assistance to Programme countries. Funding for this project was secured from the European Union (EU) Water Facility to pilot the project in Ghana, Mozambique, and Nigeria for three years by which time other partners would have been identified to support the initiative.

The project aims to achieve the following objectives in the three countries: Policy makers, programme planners, donors and other sector stakeholders have the data and information at hand that enables them to improve sector planning and resource allocation, for more effective delivery of drinking water and sanitation services, focusing on those with the greatest needs.

The project contributes to:

- Accelerate progress towards reaching the MDG targets on safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
- Enable a pro-poor focus of new drinking water and sanitation services through better identification of the poorest and most-vulnerable.

The project is set to deliver the following results:

- An operational platform for water and sanitation sector monitoring which draws on participation of stakeholders from civil society, private sector, academia, and different levels of government.
- Convergence of existing national and sub-national information streams and data relevant to the WASH sector.
- Increased access by different stakeholders to relevant water and sanitation information and data, at national and sub-national level.

Specific activities of the platforms

Below are the specific activities that the Platforms perform:

- Analyze and disseminate water and sanitation data from the various data generation institutions to appropriate audiences;
- Make water and sanitation data available to the media and involve them in disseminating to the public;
- Facilitate discussions on harmonizing water and sanitation definitions in order to minimize disparities in data;
- Generate stakeholder and public debates on water and sanitation sector monitoring through interactions with the media, stakeholder seminars and workshops;
- Publicize the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) for water and sanitation and the role of JMP in monitoring and reporting on global progress towards the MDGs;
- Disseminate water and sanitation sector policies, strategies and plans, as well as institutional frameworks of key water and sanitation institutions.

Operational strategy

The Platforms primarily assemble, analyse, re-package and disseminate available WASH sector data to identified data users. This means that the Platforms do not generate primary data but rather attempt to make available data more useful.

Quality assurance

There is an international mentor group who provides support in ensuring that the products are consistently of high quality and are accurate. Draft products are first circulated among the mentors, the JMP Technical Advisory Group and other relevant sector professionals for their inputs before finalization and dissemination. At the country level, an Advisory Group with membership from key sector institutions and practitioners is established to provide another level of guidance and quality assurance to the Platform and its operations. The Platform also consults the primary sources of data for validation of figures and other information.

Dissemination of products

The platforms' products are packaged in simple publications in both hard and electronic mediums. The Platform also works very closely with the media and also creates dissemination in order to get available information out to relevant stakeholders.

Governance

Oversight is provided by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP). At the country level UNICEF Country Offices facilitate the establishment and operations of the monitoring platforms and serve as a convening power for stakeholders to support and provide oversight of the operations and outputs of the project platforms. All the Platforms are currently hosted by the respective government Ministries or departments in charge of Water and Sanitation.

Achievements so far – Examples from Ghana (May to November 2008)

1. **The issue of shared toilet facility has been brought to the fore in Ghana.** Not until the WSMP had carefully analyzed the JMP report that indicated that Ghana was only 10% covered in terms of use of improved toilet facilities for 2006, shared toilet facilities did not appear to be an issue. This situation has now been clarified after intense dissemination of the JMP report by WSMP Ghana and the explanation of the fact that for international comparison, shared toilet facilities are not considered as improved and thus investments in those facilities may not count towards achieving the MDGs. Presently, led by the Sector Ministry, stakeholders in Ghana have started discussions on the possible review of latrine delivery strategies in the country.
2. **The issue of high risk child faeces disposal methods has been highlighted in the media.** Disposal of child faeces have been part of hygiene promotion messages especially at the community level by hygiene promoters. However, there had hardly been discussions based on scientific research into how parents or guardians actually dispose of the faeces of their children. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2006 report by the GSS provided data on this. And given the high risk nature of the practice, WSMP organized a press conference on the issue. The media especially have shown tremendous interest in the issue and some of them have done some great publications on it.
3. **Increased understanding of certain sector definitions:** From the way data is interpreted by sector actors, it came to light that some sector players and data users were not conversant with certain sector definitions. At one of the WSMP organized workshops, participants were happy to learn the differences between user-based data and provider-based data and when such data may be used for analyses, planning and decision-making. Other definitions such as 'coverage' and 'use,' a shared and a household toilet facility etc provided further enlightenment to participants.
4. **Increased sector visibility through mass media programmes:** The Platform's regular media briefs and articles on available data have contributed tremendously to the current visibility of the sector especially in terms of sanitation. The two leading political parties even quoted the WSMP in one of their presentations at an inter-party debate on sanitation.

Lessons learnt

From project conception to the establishment of the platform and actual implementation phases, a number of lessons have been learnt.

What has worked

1. At the country level, the platform has been anchored within the requisite sector ministries and departments. This arrangement has made it easier for the platform to market itself and gain government and stakeholder recognition;
2. The composition of the teams have been perfect; a combination of the right professionals with much experience and knowledge in the water and sanitation sector working as a team;
3. In Ghana, the Platform has been able to make its mission and objectives clear to the various data generating institutions and it has maintained cordial working relations with them through regular meetings, consultations and sharing of information. This strategy has prevented these institutions from perceiving the platform as a 'competitor.'
4. Experienced international mentors and editorial groups have provided consistent quality assurance support to the platforms, thus contributing to the credibility of platform products;

What has not worked well

1. It was difficult to find the appropriate host at the country level. There had to be a lot of discussions and consultations, leading to more than a year's delay in the implementation phase in all the three countries.
2. It has been difficult recruiting qualified and experienced Platform staff especially the Data Analyst and Communication Specialist. Some of them feared that the lifespan of the project was too short.
3. The project proposal and budgets were all developed in New York without adequate consultations with the countries involved. This has caused some difficulties at the implementation phase as some of the requirements are difficult to fulfil locally.

Conclusion

The Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring Platforms have proven to be viable units providing important and user-friendly WASH sector data and information for various purposes necessary to accelerate access, especially by the poor to safe sustainable drinking water and improved sanitation services.

Based on the current lessons learnt, it may be useful for any country wanting to establish a similar platform to align the project to existing structures and institutions in order to facilitate easier stakeholder buy-in. Insistence on the quality and credibility of outputs and the professionalism of project staff are very essential. It is also very important to involve all necessary institutions at the country level at the project formulation stage in order to minimize apathy at the project implementation phase.

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