

# Re-imagine reporting: Sharing Lessons to improve programmes

## Author

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## Abstract

The non-profit reporting process is tedious and inefficient, used primarily to demonstrate that money has been spent and specific activities completed, in order to provide a level of “financial accountability” which justifies continued funding. Traditional reporting often misses a golden opportunity to realise and share critical findings as they are meant to justify funding alone, rather than reflect on ways to truly improve. Reports should be an opportunity for reflection and to share an understanding of programmatic impact and direction of travel. Water For People has built an online platform, RiR (re-imagine reporting), which: (1) visualise programmatic and financial data, partnership assessments, narrative, and yearly country program analyses; (2) displays the totality of work, from district and country level to a regional overview; (3) allows donors and the broader development community to see the breadth of programmatic outcomes; and (4) provides one location for local staff and partners to reflect holistically on organisational data and insight. Integral to RiR is a series of events, which identifies successes, challenges and priority areas for improvement, and provides the analysis to inform the narrative and explain the data on the platform.

Three Water For People country programmes have already completed their annual reviews using data available on RiR, comprehensively evaluating district and country level information. These efforts have resulted in: (1) changes in programmatic strategy and financial investment to address weaknesses; (2) the need to better align annual programme monitoring, reflection periods and operational plan and budget development so we can make informed decisions on the direction of our work; and (3) programmatic progress over time, in light of the target goals of full and lasting water and sanitation coverage.

## Keywords

Reporting, monitoring, learning, program improvement.

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## **Introduction and purpose**

This paper sets out the rationale and response of Water For People to the challenge of providing more comprehensive reporting to a range of stakeholders, certainly to provide an appropriate level of accountability that donors require and putting that contribution into a larger story of “impact”, but also to inform decision-making so that field programming can be adjusted and improved to meet ambitious goals. Through providing an online platform and allocated time for reflection based on a variety of organisational information sources, we hope to re-imagine reporting (RiR) and establish the basis for better decision-making and long-term management of sustainable services.

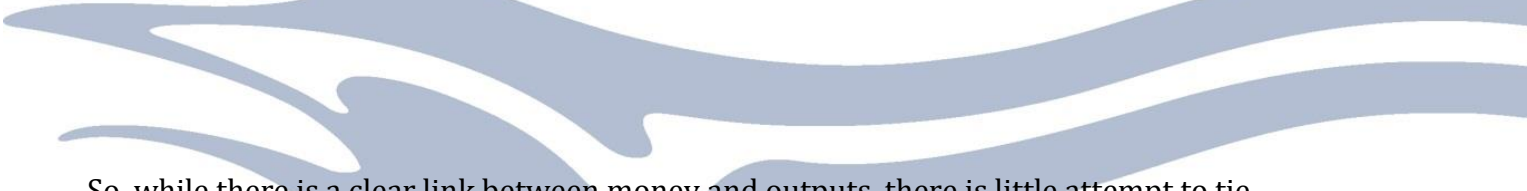
## **Context**

Water For People believes that the traditional project cycle, based on one- to three-year funding cycles, is broken. Unfortunately, this still drives much of development financing, even though the traditional project cycle can rarely hope to establish the necessary conditions for sustainability within that timeframe. The current incentives in project management are geared towards delivering a set of outputs within a certain budget. This provides accountability at one level - resources are expended and results reported on clear outputs - but it provides no insight into the longer-term impact or real return on that investment.

In contrast, Everyone Forever (EF) is an initiative which ensures that every household, clinic and school receives basic water and sanitation services on a sustainable basis. EF goes beyond project-based work to stress the value of partnerships, leveraged funding, innovative market-based solutions and rigorous monitoring to attain full water and sanitation coverage for everyone with sustainable solutions that last forever. A key feature is its targeted focus at a district scale, working in partnership with district and national government to strengthen local markets for service delivery. EF is based on the premise that governments are responsible for creating the conditions for water and sanitation service delivery and programming is geared to supporting government’s ability to do its job, creating conditions where a market for services - whether delivered by public or private providers, but accountable to consumers and regulators - can be sustained over time, without direct intervention from external agencies.

To better describe and understand the complexities of this multi-faceted approach, a comprehensive reporting system is needed. However, traditional reporting systems have often been devised to report on project outputs, of one funder, rather than to show the full picture of all activities within a programme. Therefore, Water For People developed a reporting system that captures comprehensive information on programmes and shows changes over an extended period of time. RiR aims to provide the full picture of all activities being carried out by multiple local stakeholders so collectively they are able to make informed decisions to adjust and improve on-the-ground operations, towards meeting the goal of achieving EF.

Additionally, traditional reporting often fails to get beyond a link between outputs and expenditure to provide any indication of the “impact” or outcomes that are being achieved.



So, while there is a clear link between money and outputs, there is little attempt to tie financing to outcomes. As such, donor reports often show the outputs that each donor has funded, but not the totality of the work. Instead, RiR provides external supporters and investors in the work with a clear picture of change and impact over time, and helps to build a more accurate sense of the return from that investment. The primary purpose of RiR is to inform, in a more meaningful and substantive way than traditional reporting has done to date.


### **Methodology**

RiR has two very different but important aspects. The first is the product – the reporting platform itself – which publicly and visually displays the information to external audiences to better demonstrate impact. The second, which utilises the data available on the platform, is a process by which the information is analysed and reviewed by decision-makers on the ground – annual reflections – which lead to programmatic improvements. The RiR platform brings together various tools Water For People has developed to better understand district-wide efforts to reach EF. Data gathered from these tools are presented and analysed in one place, leading to a holistic portrayal of work and results and progress. The following information is presented on the platform:

### **Programme monitoring results**

Within EF areas district-wide community- and household-level monitoring takes place on an annual basis, using Akvo FLOW. Today, data is typically collected by teams consisting of Water For People staff and local government or local utility officials. Over time, Water For People's participation is reducing as the capacity of local partner's increases, and as partners gain access to their own Akvo FLOW dashboards. Incorporating the costs of monitoring in recognised budgets of those ultimately responsible, underpins the establishment of a sustainable system going forwards. To view and download dashboard and RiR data, it is necessary to have internet connectivity. But offline versions can also be used for analysing data when necessary. In many of the countries in which we work, connectivity is adequate at local government level today, which allows relevant institutions to monitor and use the results to inform their own investment and annual operating plans. For example, the data collected in Bolivia in 2011 showed that remote households were not connecting to community-level systems. This led to government and Water For People prioritising self-supply and multi-family solutions. The surveys being promoted through the programme are not intended to replace or duplicate existing national systems or data collection efforts, but are intended to complement those. In both Uganda and India we know that local government information needs are more detailed than national government and that the frequency of collection of national data is not as regular as some local authorities would like. In Honduras and Nicaragua, the SIASAR system is being re-implemented nationally at the moment, and we believe that it will be possible to use SIASAR results to inform RiR, rather than continuing with separate surveys through Akvo FLOW.

Practically, Water For People encourages the use of three different surveys currently. Water point surveys, household surveys and public institution surveys collect critical information about all water sources used. Where there is an improved source, those



surveys collect information regarding the type of system and indicators on the level of service provided, including quantity, quality and continuity of service. Other information collected on the water point surveys include the existing management system, tariffs, availability of spare parts, financial situation of the service provider and clarification of responsibility for operation and maintenance. Some specific water point survey questions are scored to provide a picture of current service and sustainability levels. An example from Rwanda can be found in annex 1 below.

Household surveys collect information about in-home water handling and management practices, conditions conducive for proper hygiene practices and the current sanitation situation. Sanitation questions include the type of sanitation solution, condition of the slab and superstructure, usage practices, and even topics such as pit emptying, satisfaction, and personal cash invested in the toilet.

In Latin America, annual monitoring exercises include collecting water point and public institution surveys at all districts where we work. In Africa and India, annual monitoring covers a statistically significant sample of water points and public institutions. In all countries, household surveys are conducted in a statistically significant sample of households.

### **Program activities**

Tracking spreadsheets have been used by Water For People since 2007 to track, by country, the progress of and data specific to each individual community water, sanitation and school implementation efforts (hardware and software).

### ***Financial Allocations***

In an effort to better understand the different investments which have been made by all the different stakeholders, contributions to hardware and software activities are tracked, and direct costs (under WASH Cost definitions) Water For People's expenditures are tracked in our organisation-wide financial system, Netsuite, and investments from other stakeholders. Additionally, we utilise AtWhatCost, a tool developed by Water For People to better understand the life-cycle costs of specific systems and how far different combinations of revenue (tariffs, taxes and transfers) will be needed in the future for minor and major repairs, possible system expansion and eventual replacement of the system. At What Costs is an excel document, this tool provides a model of a local water system so that local stakeholders can better plan for financing their system in the short- and long-term.

### **Local capacity for Everyone Forever**

Through a self-analysis involving responsible authorities, service providers and programme staff, we evaluate existing capacity in order to determine the "state of readiness" to fulfil roles in long-term service provision. Identifying which roles and responsibilities need strengthening and which are adequate. The results are scored so that change over time can be monitored. The "institutional readiness" tool is a simple Microsoft Word-based table which lists all activities required for Efto be achieved and identifies the institution(s) primarily responsible for each activity. A score is given for each activity on a

scale of 1-4, with 1 meaning the institution is not at all ready to perform the activity without outside support and 4 meaning the institution is completely “ready.”

### **Customer feedback**

In order to elicit feedback from stakeholders at different levels we are currently trialling the administration of a simple set of questions to water and sanitation service users regarding performance of service providers and to organisations supported by Water For People, regarding the effectiveness of this support.

### **Water resource status**

Future development will include a visualisation of the current status of the water resource and an assessment of the long-term sustainability of that.

### **Narrative story**

A narrative story line will display a collection of stories, photos, videos and reports to show the activities that affect the country and district programmes in a fluid manner. The compilation of all of these pieces seeks to tell a story of impact – allowing us to see how finance and partnerships affect our service and sustainability success. And vice versus – how our level of service and sustainability changes where we invest money.

The most recent release of the RiR reporting platform can be found at [reporting.waterforpeople.org](http://reporting.waterforpeople.org) and the most up to date version will be demonstrated during the symposium. Viewers and decision-makers are able to see numerous datasets over time to better draw connections between information and more easily identify successes and challenges. The intention is to use technology for management and visualisation of data, which is user orientated, on-line and interactive. The platform provides a means to aggregate information, at country and global level, and can be viewed currently in both English and Spanish. To date, RiR reflections have taken place in three country offices, with the intention of rolling out across the whole organisation in the coming year, to then be carried out on an annual basis. These reviews have been constructed as three day events, with pre-meeting work and involvement of programme partners on at least one of the days with a significant part of this day focused on reflection on Water For People's performance and how support to partners can be improved in order to achieve Forever. There is no doubt that it will be essential that local bodies have clear responsibility for oversight and capacities for adaptive management. These reflections provide an important step along that path, with the goal to one day be driven locally by local WASH development authorities. The reflection process has four central aims:

- Interpret and summarise findings across datasets available on the RiR platform;
- Create a dialogue to understand and describe programme strengths on which to build and weaknesses to address and adjust for improvement;
- Identify and prioritise actions to address challenges going forward;
- Create a series of outputs from the reflection, both video and narrative in nature, which informs the information displayed on the RiR platform.

As we review all of the information available to us during the RiR reflection, Table 1 provides an overview of the outcomes we are looking for, and rationale as to why this information is so important, to the work we do.

Table 1: Expected Outcomes & Rationale for Potential Impact

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	RATIONALE FOR IMPACT
Investment in hardware and software <i>decreases</i> from Water For People while it <i>increases</i> with local partners, with overall local investment increasing and replacing Water For People's over time.	For water systems and sanitation options to be sustainable, external NGOs cannot continue to invest in their repair and/or replacement in the long-term; therefore, local funds must increase and compensate for reduced levels of outside investment.
Improved financial planning by villages and governments for maintenance, minor or major repair, and eventual replacement of a water system.	We are beginning to better understand the life-cycle costs of water systems; with this knowledge, local partners can plan and build up capital <i>now</i> for challenges that will inevitably arise in the future.
Increased and/or <i>maintained</i> levels of service of water systems, based upon our global metrics for service, over time in districts where we work, with the goal of 100% of water points providing intermediate or high levels of service (=Everyone).	Water systems must continue to provide an on-going service of sufficient, safe water to a fair number of people within a specified distance to collect water, all of which must meet local government standards. This moves us away from saying that simply being able to access water is enough – the system must continue to provide a high level of service over time, tracked with global service provision metrics.
Increased and/or <i>maintained</i> levels of sustainability of water systems, based upon our global metrics for sustainability, over time in districts where we work, with the goal of 100% of water points providing intermediate or high levels of sustainability (=Forever).	Water systems need to always have water flowing, have people in place that can maintain and fix it regularly, and be financially supported by local partners for it to be repaired, expanded, and replaced in the future. This allows us to track that our programmatic efforts are ensuring true sustainability, using our global sustainability metrics.
Increased number of household sanitation options in districts where we work, with the goal of 100% coverage (=sustainable sanitation).	We want to make sure that more and more households have the ability to pay for their own sanitation options that local businesses provide for them, by accessing the right capital to do so. This means that we are testing whether we can build the right sanitation markets locally so that The options must include products people like!

Increased ability and capacity of local government partners to respond to water challenges that will inevitably arise, as measured by our institutional readiness tool.	This is a measure of the effectiveness of the ecosystem to provide sustainable water services, in the long-term.
Increased ability and capacity of local government partners to respond to sanitation challenges that will inevitably arise, as measured by our institutional readiness tool.	This is a measure of the effectiveness of the ecosystem to provide sustainable water services, in the long-term.
Number of communities, schools, and clinics where we complete programmatic efforts annually, showing that over time our focus is transitioning from direct implementation and/or support of water and sanitation efforts to indirect facilitation of relevant local partners' efforts.	We believe Everyone Forever is an exit strategy in and of itself, as we are working to provide a permanent solution that depends not on our continued success locally, but the success of local, permanent institutions. This means our continued support must be to ensure that local institutional capacity is strengthened.
In-country operational plans and budgets are better aligned to take into account the results found from the re-imagine reporting reflection process, so human and financial resources are dedicated to maintaining and institutionalising locally successful programs, and innovation solutions are sought out and tested in areas where there are weaknesses.	We don't like talking about failures, because it means that a problem was not addressed, and <i>acted on</i> . This means that these reflections are critical to deepening our understanding of what is working and what is not, so that we can respond, adjust, and always improve what we do. These changes in strategy to improve our programmes must be integrated into our planning documents and budgets, so that we can appropriately invest and track our progress towards these outcomes.

In summary, RiR is a place and process by which we can comprehensively monitor on-going work in 30 EF districts worldwide. For Water For People, monitoring is the tool to ensure organisational effectiveness, allowing for improvement and innovation at all levels. Monitoring empowers in-country staff and partners to identify programmatic strengths on which to build and weaknesses which become the target of joint-problem solving with local governments and communities. Thinking needs to be in terms of movement and trends; failure for us is not monitoring, not learning, not reflecting, and not changing.

### Key findings

The RiR reflections push the idea that programmatic change needs to come through an informed debate based on data, rather than anecdotal evidence. In our limited experience of using the platform and the comprehensive datasets it portrays, there have been significant changes as a result. Outlined below in Table 2 are summaries of the successes,

challenges and prioritised areas of improvement for one of the countries from the reflection.

Table 2: Outcomes from a review exercise

Honduras: June 2012
<p><b>Successes:</b> We reached Everyone in one municipality, Chinda; across all program areas 68% of the communities where we work have water coverage, up 17% in just one year; 59% of the water systems are likely or highly likely to be sustainable, up 20% since last year; Sanitation coverage is at 60% in the communities; Some relationships with local partners are moving away from simply providing funding, but to providing increased mentoring and technical assistance in order to achieve Everyone Forever.</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> Strengthening watershed management practices; Increasing capacity of local water boards; Shifting monitoring to local level authorities; Continuing to leverage funds with local municipal governments; Developing local financing strategies that allow communities to replace systems on their own; Continuing to transition sanitation approach away from subsidizing infrastructure.</p> <p><b>Strategies Moving Forward:</b> Improving fee collection; Supporting local water boards to build knowledge and skills; Developing strategies on water resource management that secure access to water resources through legal instruments; Creating supervisory bodies in each municipality that facilitate cooperation amongst municipalities, government agencies, and civil society to support water and sanitation plans and preparation of annual budgets; Providing a strong foundation in the four municipalities where we work so that they can serve as an example to scale up the Everyone Forever strategy to department and eventually, to national level.</p>

## Conclusions

The Re-imagine Reporting (RiR) initiative is Water For People's effort to move away from traditional project cycle reporting and shift the conversation from outputs and expenditures towards long-term impact. The RiR platform provides a way of communicating information and describing change in discrete geographical areas, which is useful to the decision-makers in those areas. This provides the basis for programmatic understanding and improvement. In addition, for Water For People it provides a way of showing progress to other organisational stakeholders, and in trying to do this on a joint platform, we are both hoping to reduce our own reporting workload as well as provide a more complete picture of progress towards goals.

RiR is Water For People's attempt to demonstrate how lessons from comprehensive programmatic efforts can be shared publicly but still utilised to improve overall performance of work on the ground. We recognise that there will be debate about the indicators and tools we have chosen to use to reflect on these goals; however, we challenge others to explore how they, too, could utilise progress tracking tools to inform decision-making for local stakeholders while presenting results to external supporters. The process of conducting reflections using comprehensive information regarding our field work has allowed for adaptive management, local innovation and overall improvement of our work



so we can remain accountable to achieving the ambitious goals of reaching Everyone Forever. For Water For People, this is truly the impact we are trying to achieve, and the RiR initiative is helping to drive us forward in these efforts.

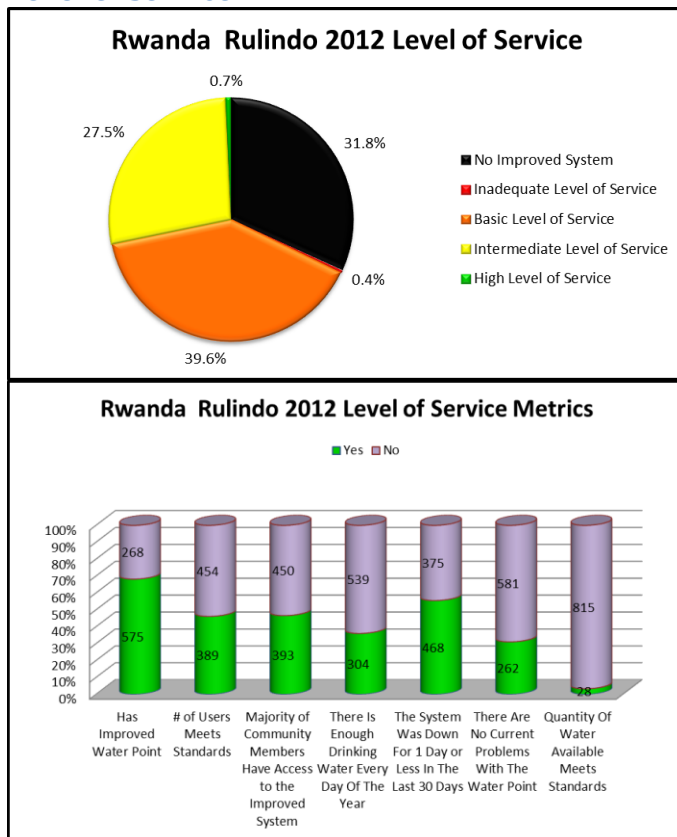
Appendix 1

**Rulindo, Rwanda**

2012: 843 water points monitored

The staff in Rwanda recently completed full monitoring of all water points in the 17 sectors of the district of Rulindo. This included all unimproved places where people collect drinking water (rivers, lakes, unprotected well and springs, scoop holes, etc.). This represents the first full data collection in the region and in addition to the 843 water points, data was collected at 124 schools and clinics and 2,824 households in the district.

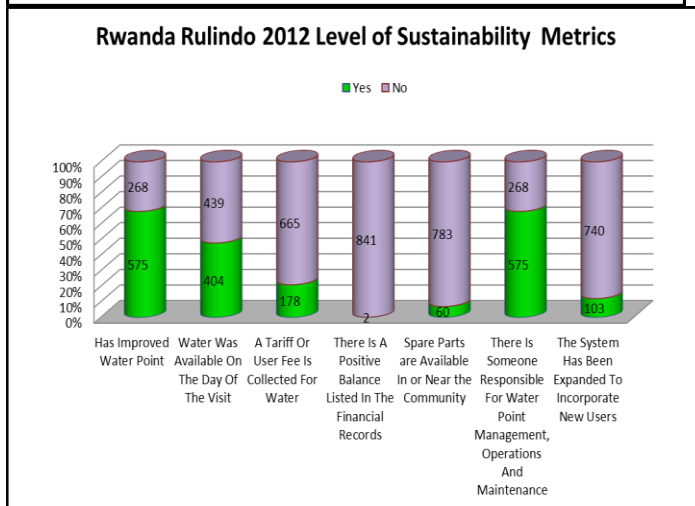
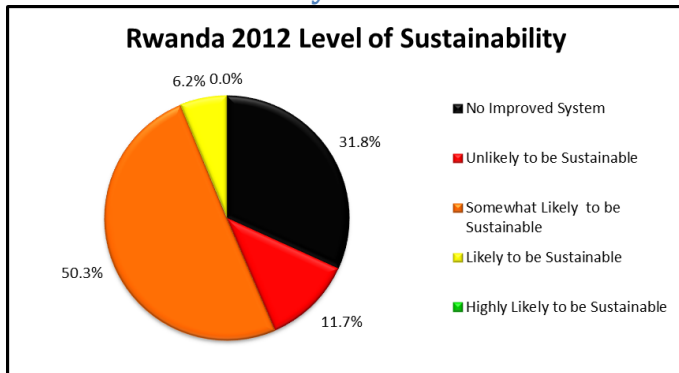
**Level of service**



The Level of Service established in this data collection will serve as the baseline that data will be compared against in the future and the data will help staff make programmatic decisions. The initial data shows that only 28.2% of the water points in the district are at an Intermediate or High Level of Service, this means almost 40% of the water systems in the district will need some level of intervention or rehabilitation to bring their functionality up to an adequate level and 31.8% will need infrastructure so that users have access to improved water points. Almost all key metrics for Level of Service were at low levels but water points that have current problems, the quantity of water not meeting government

standards and not having enough water every day of the year were the most significant metrics that will need to be addressed when planning future programmatic work.

### Level of sustainability



The Level of Sustainability reveals that no water points are Highly Likely to be Sustainable and only 6.2% of the water points are Likely to be Sustainable. Only 50.3% of the water points are Somewhat Likely to be sustainable and almost half (43.5%) are either Unlikely to be Sustainable or are Unimproved. The sustainability metrics show that critical barriers to sustainability are tariff collection, maintaining financial records – particularly with a positive balance, maintaining local access to spare parts and expanding access to new users. However, even though overall sustainability indicators were low, there were positive indicators in that water points often had someone who was responsible for maintenance and operations.