

CHAPTER 4

Transforming accountability and project monitoring for stronger national WASH sectors

Harold Lockwood

In spite of advances in alignment with country systems, many development partners still tend to focus monitoring efforts on their 'own' projects, driven by a strong burden of accountability to taxpayers and individual and institutional donors. Project-monitoring efforts are fragmented and often work around government-led systems. They tend to stop once the implementing agency withdraws. Conversely, project monitoring can offer flexibility and speed for testing innovative approaches and new technologies. The reality in many developing countries is that government-led water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) monitoring systems remain weak and are often underfunded. Despite these dilemmas, several recent trends indicate that project monitoring and government-led systems can be mutually beneficial. This can only be achieved if all actors communicate better and modify their organizational behaviours; much of this will be determined by changing the incentives for monitoring. When planned and communicated well, project efforts can contribute positively to permanent, comprehensive, national sector monitoring systems.

Keywords: project monitoring, accountability, development partner, national sector monitoring system, government leadership

Introduction

Over the last decade there has been a major shift in perspective in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector in line with broader efforts to reform the effectiveness of development aid and to promote greater country ownership. The Paris Declaration and subsequent agreements have set out clear principles pointing towards the need for greater alignment with government priorities and country systems, including monitoring frameworks. Support is increasing for common programming frameworks, including sector-wide approaches (SWAps), with the explicit acceptance of joint monitoring and reporting frameworks (WHO, 2012), and there is a growing number of examples of common nationwide monitoring systems.¹ The global monitoring architecture

spearheaded by the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) calls for a process of alignment around more common standards and indicators. And yet the reality in many developing countries is that country-led WASH monitoring systems remain weak or fragmented, are often underfunded, and are de-linked from core public sector systems.²

Development partners of all shapes and sizes – from small charities to large international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), bilateral donors, and the major lending banks – support WASH interventions that often include a monitoring component. These externally financed programmes can provide valuable testing grounds for new, innovative approaches and technologies and are often flexible and responsive enough to allow for quick learning cycles. However, such agencies often focus monitoring efforts on their ‘own’ project interventions, driven by a strong burden of accountability to taxpayers and institutional donors. Despite public acknowledgement and commitments to promote the use of country systems, concerns remain over lack of capacity.³ The result is that project-monitoring efforts may often work around, instead of working with, country-led systems. For many years this has resulted in a plethora of fragmented efforts to monitor WASH interventions that fall away once project funding has run out or the implementing agency withdraws.

One result of this tension over the long term is that development of truly comprehensive, well-functioning national systems has been undermined. But the reality is that such project monitoring, often linked to implementation on the ground, is not about to go away, particularly in many aid-dependent countries, and it is likely to be a continuing feature of the sector for the next 10 to 15 years. Accountability is the key driver in this equation and raises some fundamental questions: why do we monitor? For whom? And, by extension, what do we monitor? The challenge therefore is how to harness all of the positive elements and innovation that external aid projects can bring and find ways in which these experiences can be integrated, scaled up, and sustained within the predominantly low-resource realities of national and local government systems.

What is project monitoring?

Of course, the term ‘project’ in its purest sense has no value connotation, either positive or negative, and simply describes the action of planning or designing something to be done or carried out.⁴ As such, all organizations across public, non-profit, and private sectors employ projects, typically following a common cycle. Well-planned, properly resourced projects are needed, as much in the WASH sector as anywhere else. Here we make a distinction between two types of monitoring: the first is typically geared towards reporting progress against the correct and timely inputs for construction of civil works and initial software interventions, against stated time frames or budgets. The second type also incorporates outputs and outcomes.

Externally funded projects tend to focus most closely on the former, but this is not universally the case; many ‘projects’ also seek to monitor

outcomes and impacts (e.g. on health) – these have been labelled ‘results-based monitoring systems’. There are also examples of development partner project monitoring aimed at sector reform processes. Equally, national systems track inputs of money and activities, as well as outputs and outcomes. The distinction or meaning we draw in the context of this discussion can perhaps be best captured by thinking of project monitoring as having some or all of the following characteristics:

- Monitoring is limited to the defined lifespan of a project or programme intervention and is generally short term (usually not more than five years maximum).
- There is monitoring of outcomes and even impacts that fall outside, or are de-coupled from, government-led or sanctioned data collection, performance management systems, and policy priorities. By definition, this includes all externally funded projects that are executed outside a SWAp or similar common framework.
- The pressure for accountability, and data flows, is typically upwards and outwards, and the primary – and in some cases sole – purpose is to inform external funders about progress and performance.
- Monitoring may be driven by a desire for (international) visibility and profiling.

There are, of course, examples of project monitoring that are a force for good, bringing new technologies or approaches to the table and testing these at scale to help trigger change and progress in national systems. Monitoring that is flexible and can test what works and what doesn’t in short learning cycles is a great asset. This facet or benefit is illustrated by Kate Fogelberg of Water For People (WFP), when she explains the support WFP gives to the local government in the rural municipality of Cuchumuela, Bolivia. One of her claims is that WFP is small, and as such can ‘*fail fast*’, but it can also inspire government to try new things. As part of the capacity support programme, WFP supports the authorities to monitor all projects in its jurisdiction, regardless of who constructed the systems, using smart phones to improve the data collection process and visualization of results. The work of WFP in this municipality has led to change, with new by-laws being established to improve the management of systems. In part this work at the local level is helping to bridge the gap between accountability to the donor (do our own projects continue to function over time?) and to local government (are we delivering services to all our citizens in the municipality?).

A related example is the fact that much of the recent exponential growth in the use of mobile phone technology for improving the speed, reliability, and effectiveness of data collection was initially driven by short-term project experiences.⁵ But we also know of many cases where project monitoring is very extractive, with its main aim being to inform head office reporting requirements and enhance visibility, and does little to improve performance on the ground.

Why this debate matters for sustainable WASH services

In the end, comprehensive and robust monitoring is about improving performance and delivering better services. Measuring the right things at the right time and, most critically, ensuring a response (at both operational and policy level) to make things better are at the heart of why monitoring is done at all. And ultimately it matters because of the accountability of all stakeholders – operators, governments, and development partners – to the consumers and end users of WASH services. Government should be accountable to citizens for ensuring the provision of permanent WASH services, which is now enshrined as a human right (De Albuquerque, 2010). Good monitoring systems should translate this right into providing the poor with a ‘voice’, to demand and realize these (ever improving) services.

But the availability of reliable information has long been a major weakness in the WASH sector, especially for rural and peri-urban areas not served by formal utilities. Unlike in urban contexts where performance monitoring is much more commonplace,⁶ many rural sectors lack comprehensive and regularly collected data. There is often disagreement over even simple information, such as access and functionality between government sector WASH institutions, the national statistical bureau, and external development partner stakeholders. Such data should provide the basic building blocks to inform good decision making about resource allocation and to support corrective actions at the local level. As well as supporting local-level performance, such monitoring also provides the evidence for improving sector policy and holding government and others to account. Conversely, lack of leadership and failure to support monitoring in the WASH sector may be a reflection of government not taking full responsibility and ownership, and instead relying on the easier – and short-term – fix of project financing.

Where monitoring does take place, approaches tend to focus on a limited set of indicators that measure coverage and (nominal) numbers served rather than quality aspects of the service, which can be proxy indicators for sustainability; these could include the level of downtime, the performance of operators, and the capacity to support local operators.⁷ This is an area for improvement – for both country-led and project monitoring – that can be addressed through learning supported by project monitoring funded by development partners.

This debate matters because in low-income countries with highly aid-dependent WASH sectors, development partners often have a disproportionate influence on what is monitored and how data is shared and used. Ready use and ownership of data, especially by local government, is critical. And yet well-resourced development partner programmes are often much more powerful than their local counterparts and can drive the agenda simply due to their financial muscle, establishing monitoring frameworks that are simply too complex or costly for (local) government to take over and sustain. Indeed, it could be argued that monitoring systems led by development partners are a distraction that often aggravate, rather than contribute to, local capacity

building. The end result is a patchwork of monitoring efforts that often co-exist in the same geographic area⁸ but fall away as project funding winds down.

This situation has been further complicated by the growing pace of *decentralization and institutional reform*, both within the WASH sector and in public administration more broadly. The standard rallying cry now is for local government to be responsible for post-construction support and monitoring. The reality is that many (weak) local governments are left to manage a set of incompatible and parallel monitoring systems, including those of their own, which would be a challenge even for high-capacity organizations.

There are also differing needs for data at local government level. A district water officer will monitor to identify problems, which they would then act upon to improve or resolve. Data may be fed up to national level with the expectation that funding will be released to address these problematic communities. But if the national database is simply a repository, with no resulting action, this merely ends as a reporting exercise (Smits et al., 2013: 10). This debate then also throws into sharp relief the relationship between local government and central line ministries and the often weak and tenuous links between them when it comes to compatible data collection, storage, analysis, and action.

Main themes and challenges in project monitoring

The interface between project monitoring and country-led frameworks is complex and driven by a wide range of incentives that can go far beyond the confines of the WASH sector. One of the most important drivers of this relationship is accountability, which sits at the centre of this debate: why do we monitor? For whom? And, by extension, what do we monitor? But this interface will be influenced by other variables. On the one hand, it will be affected by the country and sector in question and, for example, the relative strength of public sector management systems, the national statistical bureau, and the vision and capacity of central government to set out programme-based approaches to sector support. On the other hand, individual development partner policies will have a major impact on how far monitoring efforts seek to align or diverge from country-led frameworks. For some agencies, there will always be an aversion to or mistrust of government; for others, there may be legal or institutional barriers to working more closely with public sector systems. Yet others may be providing sector or general budget support and will already be relying on common monitoring frameworks and joint sector reviews. Frequently, however, the partner countries themselves lack the will and/or capacity to manage donor support in this way; this is particularly acute among countries where capital and recurrent budgets are heavily dependent on external aid transfers.

Given this complexity and the fact that each country context is unique, how can we positively frame the discussion about the relationship between project-driven monitoring and country-led systems? One approach is to consider the main themes that appear to be important to this debate; Figure 4.1 below starts to group these issues, which are explored in brief in the following sections.

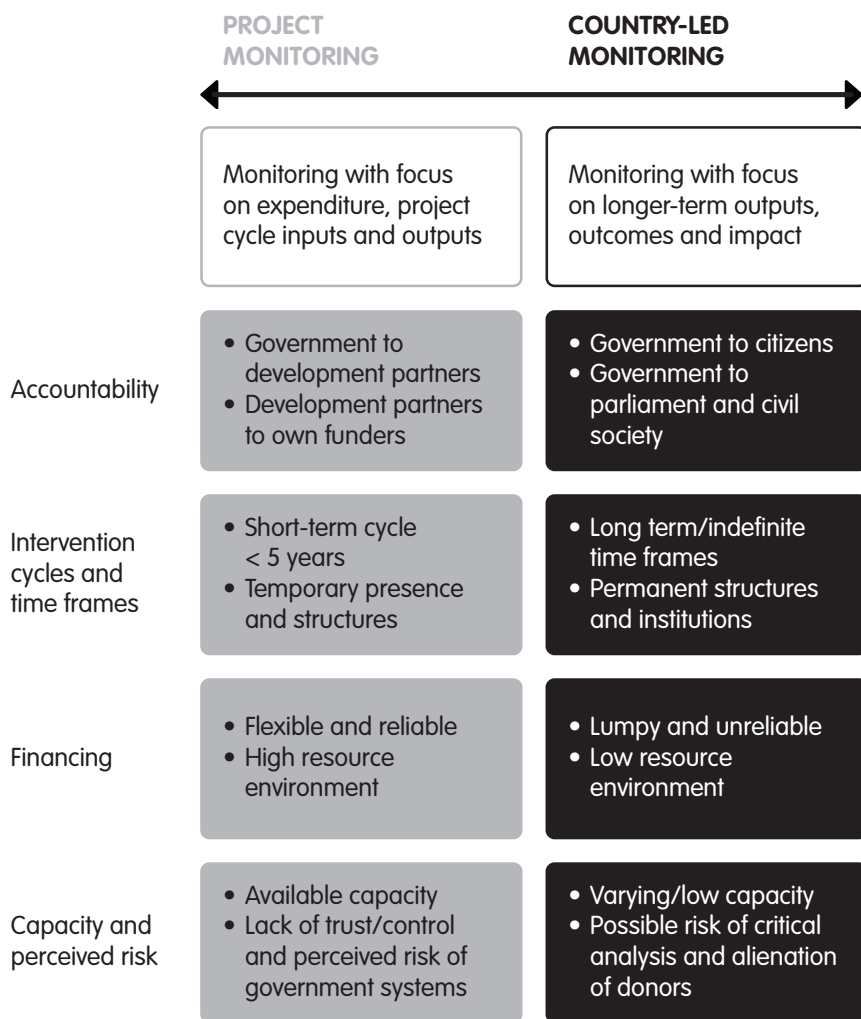


Figure 4.1 Central themes and challenges to integrating project monitoring with national frameworks

Accountability

Under the principles of the Paris Declaration, both development partners and governments share responsibility for achieving development goals – so-called mutual accountability. And yet, when it comes to monitoring and the use of the resulting outputs, each party comes under differing pressures and there is often a considerable gap between the theory and the reality:

- In theory, national government ministries are accountable to their citizens, either directly or through parliamentary oversight bodies, civil

society organizations, or umbrella groups. In reality, however, these indirect accountability mechanisms can be weak or there may be low capacity to place pressure on government by citizens in the first place.

- There may be perverse incentives to not make monitoring data more available if this exposes poor performance by national governments; in turn, low levels of accountability can lead to a cycle of low-quality data, or no data, and limited pressure to improve services.
- Where there is a heavy reliance by governments on external aid for sector investment, especially in situations where aid is project-based, then government accountability can often be skewed towards development partners.
- In the absence of strong, country-led frameworks, development partners tend to 'fill the vacuum' by establishing parallel systems.
- Development partner accountability is also two-way, with often strong pressure to report to their constituencies, for example donors to their taxpayers and NGOs and charities to their funders.
- This pressure can often lead organizations to show (superficial) results and to have visibility. This is particularly the case for NGOs, which may be fighting for a finite pot of funding, and it acts to undermine acceptance of common country-led, but perhaps more anonymous, monitoring systems.

In this situation, it is often very difficult for development partners to avoid the pressure to show results. This locks them into a type of 'vicious cycle' of accountability under which, even when there is intent to support country-led monitoring systems, the most pragmatic solution may be to establish their own parallel systems, as shown in Figure 4.2 below.

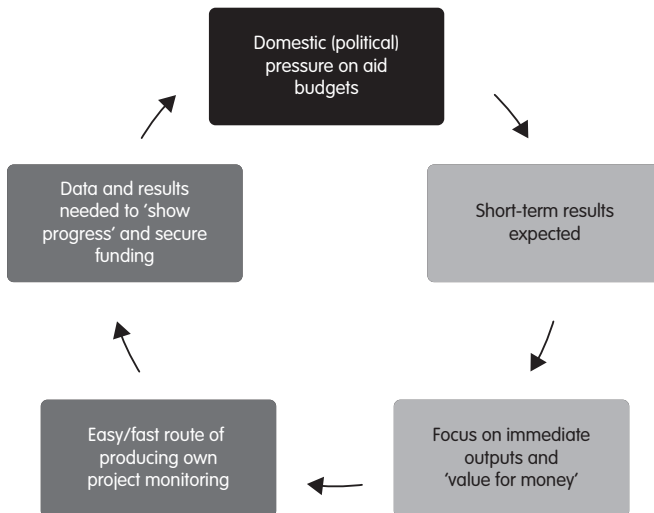


Figure 4.2 The development partner's dilemma – the vicious cycle of accountability

A pragmatic approach to bridging the accountability gap

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has designed and launched an innovative new strategy for monitoring that explicitly attempts to bridge this gap between organizational accountability (in this case to the shareholders of the AfDB regarding the exposure to risk for the loans that are extended to client countries) and accountability to national sector development.

Fabio Losa, monitoring and evaluation specialist at the bank, explains this dilemma and how a multilateral development organization such as the AfDB is simultaneously helping African countries strengthen their WASH sector monitoring and evaluation capacities, and pursuing the path towards a results-based organization, accountable to both development partners and beneficiaries, and retaining a focus on efficiency and effectiveness. Losa explains how the strategy of the Water and Sanitation Department (OWAS) of the AfDB is founded on a three-tier approach: to improve the bank's project monitoring and evaluation; to support country monitoring and evaluation capacities; and to link with global initiatives (see Figure 4.3).

At the country level, OWAS, in partnership with its regional member countries and other development partners, intends to help countries strengthen their capacities, collection processes, and monitoring systems and eventually improve information availability. At the level of WASH projects funded by the bank in its regional member countries, the goal is to improve OWAS capacities to monitor and evaluate interventions as a results-based organization that is accountable to donors and beneficiaries. The strategy is an ambitious one, spanning from 2012 to 2020, and it is starting with a first pilot phase in Malawi and the Central African Republic (Losa, 2013).

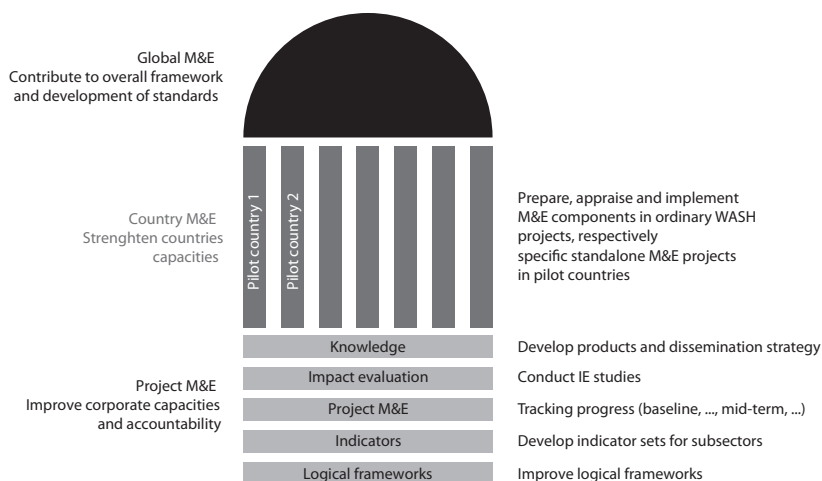


Figure 4.3 The three-tier approach of OWAS's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy

Source: Losa, 2013.

Intervention cycles and time frames

Development partners have different cultures and visions in terms of their in-country presence. Some will seek to 'work themselves out of a job', while others make explicit commitments for years or even decades. Regardless of these commitments, most development partners are themselves subject to economic, political, and at times security factors that may cut short their programmes of support, or, conversely, they may extend funding periods due to domestic political pressures. All too often, these are not technical choices based on careful reasoning, but responses to the way in which aid is politically driven. Accepting that there is a range of different experiences, a number of general trends are apparent:

- Development partner project monitoring is almost always short term (two to four or five years) with less interest in going beyond the end of project-funding horizons. Further, donor interest and policies can be fickle and fluctuate markedly depending on the pressure exerted by domestic public opinion and sudden competing geopolitical demands.
- The responsibility and mandate to monitor, both for implementing NGOs and for lending banks, often terminate with the end of the life of the project. Adopting common monitoring frameworks as part of broader SWaPs is the obvious solution. But, as noted above, even these frameworks are not respected by all stakeholders, and are not yet fully established in all countries.⁹
- Experience shows that the building of a truly comprehensive national monitoring system takes a prolonged period, sustained investment, and high levels of commitment – probably in the order of 10 years plus, which is often beyond the horizon of development partner funding cycles.
- Government time frames for monitoring are in theory infinite, but in reality they are also subject to administrative cycles or political upheaval and resistance to institutional or policy reform.
- Such political change can lead to the replacement of key individuals and the loss of institutional memory and capacity. The development of comprehensive national monitoring systems has stalled in a number of countries due to political and institutional paralysis, or simply because of a lack of political priority for monitoring, which may be seen as less important than direct service provision.

Interestingly, there have been a number of recent drives to extend development partner monitoring 'beyond the project'. One of these is based on the work of WFP, which guarantees a minimum time frame for monitoring of 10 years, regardless of funding cycles or presence in a particular country or district.¹⁰ Although this has been a highly visible position, it can also be construed as counterproductive to the emergence of comprehensive country-led systems given that it commits to an ongoing (external) monitoring presence. However, the stated intention is for WFP to transition this monitoring commitment to country-led (or locally led) efforts. The second example is the decision of the Dutch government and its development agency,

DGIS, to require recipients of grants to commit to ensuring service delivery over an agreed time frame (also 10 years, with a concurrent commitment to monitoring), under what they refer to as a ‘sustainability clause’.¹¹

Another example of how development partners are starting to plan for ‘beyond the project’ is presented by Heather Skilling, Senior Water and Sanitation Advisor within the Water Office of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). She explains that, as a cornerstone of the reform agenda, under the new ‘USAID Forward’ strategy, USAID has begun a critical shift in the way it administers assistance, placing a greater emphasis on public–private partnerships, channelling funding to local governments and organizations that have the in-country expertise to create sustainable change. This includes a concurrent shift in the focus of long-term monitoring that can support WASH service provision well beyond the actual implementation phase of any given USAID project. Skilling states that the USAID Water and Development Strategy will seek investments in longer-term monitoring in order to assess the sustainability and impact of project funds beyond the typical life of the project and to facilitate support to issues that arise after the completion of projects.

Box 4.1 USAID Water and Development Strategy

‘Will seek investments in longer-term monitoring and evaluation of its water activities in order to assess sustainability and impact of project funds beyond the typical life-of-project and to enable reasonable support to issues that arise subsequent to completion of projects.’

Source: Heather Skilling, USAID, Addis Ababa, 2013.

Financing

Lack of sufficient investment, as well as lack of capacity to absorb financing, is a well-documented problem in many developing country WASH sectors. In contexts where there is still the need to provide first-time access, capital investment quite rightly takes precedence and ‘softer’ areas of support, including monitoring, may often have a much lower priority.

Development partners, particularly the bilateral donors and lending banks, are addressing investments in monitoring and capacity building, but, again, such sector-level support is often tied to particular grant or loan agreements, and financing for monitoring can fluctuate markedly without the benefit of a strong SWAp arrangement. However, there are success stories that illustrate the long-term benefits of sustained financing. Uganda is a case in point, with a relatively early adoption of a SWAp and very consistent long-term support from bilateral donors, along with strong government commitment, which has resulted in a robust sector performance measurement framework (Ssozi and Danert, 2012). The key lesson here is that there has been long-term donor commitment to Uganda with support for the monitoring system over almost

10 years.¹² But even in cases such as this, significant challenges remain with development partners, which continue to operate outside such common frameworks.¹³

Many of the smaller aid agencies, and even some large-scale grant programmes, invest in their own monitoring systems, relying on a proportion of grant funding to finance this work. Inevitably, once project funding ends, so too does the financing for monitoring. The sustainability checks introduced as part of DGIS funding to a range of partners are a case in point. Although these project-monitoring mechanisms bring a welcome focus to the issues relating to long-term sustainability, the costs can be prohibitive. In some cases the checks carried out by independent auditors cost in the order of US\$100,000 plus per year for restricted sampling, which means that it would be difficult for ministries to scale up and replicate such checks across entire countries.¹⁴

Another critical challenge for the financial sustainability of monitoring systems is the capacity, especially of local government, to continue to pay for such systems. Development partners can often be hugely optimistic – or simply naive – about the financial capacity of local government to continue to bear the full costs of monitoring systems that are put in place as part of projects, as the example from Malawi shows (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2 Bridging the financing gap for monitoring at district level in Malawi

In Malawi, GPS mapping work was done from 2002 to 2005 and provided useful data for national policy but was far beyond the financial capacity of the typical Malawian district to repeat on its own, despite the sector's stated aim of having districts lead ongoing data collection. This data typically cost US\$10,000 to US\$20,000 per district to collect once, while the average budget for all recurring activities in a Malawian district is only about US\$4,900 per year, meaning that follow-up district-led data collection is almost impossible under this system. Engineers Without Borders (Canada) works with local government in Malawi, recognizing financial and resource constraints from the start, to design more affordable and replicable approaches to the monitoring of WASH services.

Source: Scott, 2012.

Capacity and perceived risk

The capacity of national institutions is often behind decisions of development partners to retain control over procurement, contracting, and monitoring processes. The same can be true in terms of the relationship between national and decentralized government, where 'lack of capacity' is frequently used by line ministries as a brake on devolution of real authority and budget allocations.

In a number of instances, the doubts of development partners about the capacity for effective monitoring are warranted. And it is also true that many decentralized authorities lack the technical capacity and recurrent budgets to

support monitoring. Conversely, it should not be automatically assumed that all external projects can monitor effectively. Weak monitoring and an absence of effective measurement frameworks can also plague large-scale donor-driven programmes.¹⁵ In fact, it is true that development partners will vary in their capacity to support national and sub-national monitoring systems; their levels of capacity are as heterogeneous as those of country partners' own national and sub-national systems.

There may be another factor at play that has more to do with the risk of losing control in cases where development partners cede the authority to monitor to national entities. This is a double-edged risk, however. The rhetoric of donors and demand for country-led processes are often strong, but may result in their own interventions being shown to perform poorly. At the same time, there may be a feeling on the part of national authorities that they should not be overly critical of development partner interventions in case this leads to less funding or a complete closing down of financial support (Segone, 2009).¹⁶

Of course, one way of breaking this capacity challenge is to make this an explicit aim of external projects that include monitoring. One such example from the AfDB was described earlier in the chapter and contrasts with a second example from the NGO sector as documented by Juliet Willetts, who presented lessons from monitoring the Civil Society Fund of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These provided an insight into some of the challenges facing sector monitoring and how NGOs might support governments in improving such systems. The fund of US\$25 million involved 11 NGOs implementing projects in 21 countries. The learning across this programme identified a wide range of possible strategies available to NGOs to support sector monitoring. This resulted in the development of a 'strategy map' or typology of roles that NGOs could play in strengthening country-led systems as part of their own project-monitoring efforts. This map resulted in three broad types of role:

- direct role in monitoring, by holding up a mirror to government about their own performance;
- building expertise in local government to improve their own monitoring;
- documenting and sharing new learning and innovation in monitoring and promoting their uptake by government.

According to this typology, strategies can be classified as *causal*, *persuasive*, or *supportive*, and either may be applied with a focus on particular individuals or groups, or may be applied to the broader enabling environment for service provision. Table 4.1 sets out this typology of the ways in which NGOs could support sector monitoring as identified by the team (Willetts et al., 2013).

Table 4.1 Typology of potential strategies for NGOs to support sector monitoring

Strategy	Causal	Persuasive	Supportive
	I-1	I-2	I-3
Focused on a particular individual or group (I)	Direct role in monitoring own direct implementation activities.	Providing awareness raising, education, or specific training to community members or other partners.	Providing frequent, sustained, ongoing mentoring and support or multipurpose capacity building; or developing support structures, committees, and networks.
	<i>Potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring:</i> Provide monitoring information to government concerning community, school, or public water and sanitation systems (either built by NGO or another agency).	<i>Potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring:</i> Build interest and motivation for local-level monitoring and support relevant skills development through training.	<i>Potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring:</i> Use systematic strategies to build monitoring skills and capacity of local government or service providers, private sector, or schools.
	E-1	E-2	E-3
Focused on the enabling environment (E)	Engaging in policy dialogue on specific issues, directly causing changes in incentives, rules, or guidelines; playing an advocacy or social accountability role.	Disseminating information widely to a broad audience; creating a persuasive environment for a specific behaviour or attitude; and conducting workshops and conferences.	Building partnerships, providing collective support, and promoting networking and coordination; also supporting higher levels of government in their role or supporting local research or action networks.
	<i>Characteristic activities in this fund:</i> Lead lobbying or mobilize community members or other partners and organizations to advocate for unified sector monitoring.	<i>Characteristic activities in this fund:</i> Document and share own learning and innovations with respect to WASH monitoring with broad set of other sector stakeholders and promote their uptake.	<i>Characteristic activities in this fund:</i> Initiate and participate in multi-stakeholder sector coordination groups that demand, develop, implement, or use sector monitoring systems; support central government in roll-out of sector monitoring.

Source: Willetts et al., 2013.

Convergence and examples of good integration

Communication and integration

There is no doubt that all development partners approach their monitoring work with the best of intentions. It is implausible that such organizations would explicitly set out to undermine the development of government-led systems. As such, a large part of the ‘convergence’ question is about communication and intent. Put simply, how well do development partners engage with government as part of their project monitoring from the outset? This is addressed by Elynn Walter of WASH Advocates in documenting the findings of a recent study into WASH in Schools monitoring (Walter, 2013). The findings are based on a set of qualitative surveys with 21 implementing and donor organizations, and identified obstacles to integration and current monitoring trends and challenges. The main barriers to integration of WASH in Schools monitoring between NGO and government systems identified in this study were:

- lack of government capacity and political will to monitor effectively;
- limited awareness of national government monitoring systems by NGOs;
- lack of willingness of NGOs to work within a system they feel ‘isn’t functioning’;
- monitoring in silos within both NGOs and governments and not sharing results;
- education ministries focusing on measuring educational outcomes and not enabling environments including WASH.

As well as uncovering the challenges, the WASH Advocates study identified instances where some degree of integration has been achieved; these included cases of open communication and coordination between NGO and government monitoring for WASH in Schools in the Philippines, Uganda, and Zambia. The paper also recognizes that these efforts are all at different levels of the integration process; a typology of integration expressed as a ‘ladder’ was developed (see Figure 4.4).

Examples of good practice

Despite the strains and tensions noted above, the situation is improving and there is already greater awareness and intent to better support country-led monitoring systems. Initiatives such as the country-level Sector Information and Monitoring Systems (SIMS) for Africa promoted by the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW), the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) of the World Bank, and the African Water Facility point to this coalescence around establishing strong national systems (World Bank, 2007). Ultimately, the pathway to this outcome will lie with common frameworks, such as SWAps and common systems, allowing better and more effective alignment between national data collection and the global processes that are currently under review by the JMP for the post-2015 landscape.

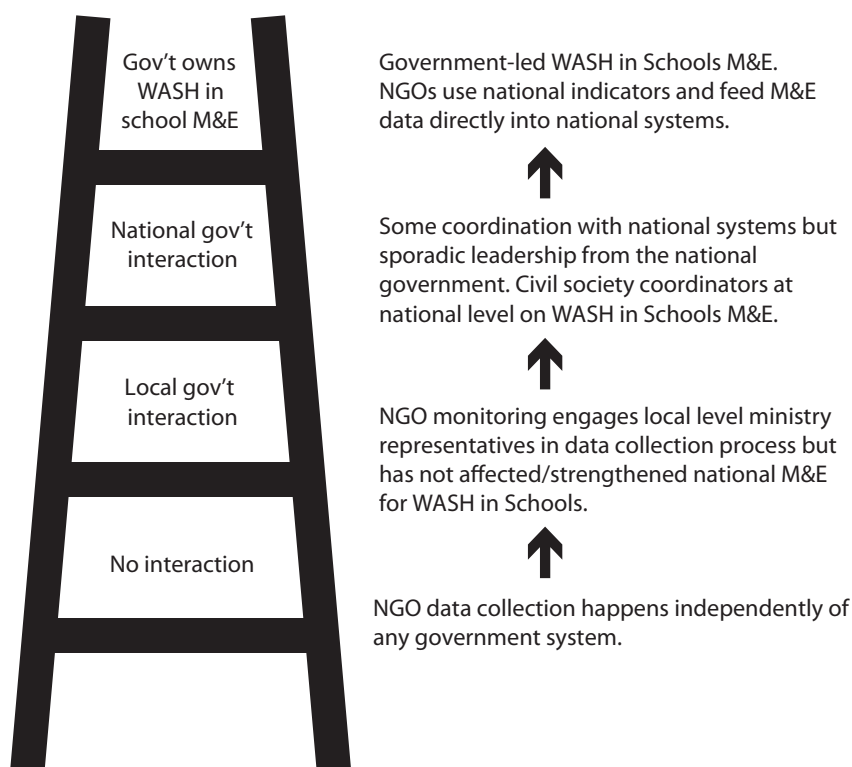


Figure 4.4 WASH in Schools monitoring and evaluation 'integration' ladder

Source: Walter, 2013.

But accepting that SWAp and other common frameworks may be some way off in all countries, in the interim there are lessons to be learned from some of the more positive examples of taking the best of project monitoring and using this to bolster country-led systems. The medium- to long-term implication is for development partners to wind down project monitoring and to do more to strengthen and pay for common government frameworks as these become better established and more refined. Some promising examples are presented in the following boxes.

Consensus and a way forward

Emerging consensus around project monitoring

A number of threads or themes in overcoming the negative consequences and tensions between 'project' monitoring and government-led monitoring emerged from the Monitoring Sustainable WASH Symposium held from 9 to 11 April 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The level of consensus points towards guarded

Box 4.3 Sustainability check tool – Mozambique

This instrument was developed under a joint UNICEF, government of Mozambique, and government of the Netherlands rural water supply and sanitation programme entitled the One Million Initiative. The aim of the tool is to provide an annual 'audit' or report on the sustainability of investments by looking at a number of core factors, including institutional, social, technical, and financial dimensions. The tool has been applied over a five-year period under this programme and has built up a cumulative picture of performance over this time.

More importantly, some of the elements of the sustainability check are now being taken up as a basis for the development of sustainability indicators for the National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (PRONASAR) by the government of Mozambique, with a scaling up of the tool within the framework of the National Directorate of Water's work plan (Godfrey et al., 2013).

Box 4.4 Scaled-up database for rural water and sanitation – Indonesia

The Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has been financing large-scale water and sanitation investments in Indonesia with the rural component supported through World Bank-led programmes, notably the Third Water Supply and Sanitation for Low Income Communities Project (PAMSIMAS) and the Water and Sanitation Policy Facility (WASPOLA). In the case of PAMSIMAS, the World Bank together with the Indonesian government's Ministry of Public Works have set up a management information system that collects project data from every district under implementation. The database is in the Bahasa Indonesian language and is available to the public. It includes project costs, community contributions, details of facilities built, number of beneficiaries, and sustainability data, entered by district facilitators. This information is then used at the central level to gauge project progress and performance; it is the only monitoring framework of this size in the country. However, it is still currently being maintained by staff from the PAMSIMAS programme, rather than by government, which calls into question the long-term viability of the system.

Source: Communications with DFAT Indonesia representative, 2013.

Box 4.5 Service delivery indicators – Ghana

In 2007, the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) developed the District Monitoring and Evaluation System (DiMES), which was supposed to be used by local government, but it was never really populated or maintained. In 2011 the CWSA, together with the Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale) project, developed a set of indicators to assess and monitor the functionality of water facilities, the level of services provided, and the performance of the community-based operator. Akvo Field Level Operations Watch (FLOW) was piloted by local government staff as a technology in three districts to map water facilities and capture the level of services provided. The CWSA aims to build on past project results and feed the data collected with FLOW into the DiMES to make it readily available for decision making at local government level. The vision of the CWSA is to mainstream this monitoring system in all districts in Ghana, and it has found development partners willing to support this vision of a scaled-up DiMES. With this financial support, and building on the initial three pilot districts, 119 more districts will now be using FLOW to collect data and DiMES for improved analysis, planning, and decision making (Duti, 2012).

Box 4.6 SIASAR initiative – Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama

The Rural Water and Sanitation Information System (Sistema de Información de Agua y Saneamiento Rural or SIASAR in its Spanish acronym) is a platform for monitoring, data collection, and analysis that has been developed as part of a Central American regional initiative supported by the Water Partnership Program (WPP) of the World Bank. The SIASAR tool has been developed in collaboration with government ministries and other national stakeholders to be a practical and interactive web platform that takes advantage of open source programming and mobile technology. It groups data into four key areas using commonly agreed upon indicators, and can produce different levels of data analysis depending on the needs of users. The long-term sustainability and scale-up of SIASAR is being addressed through strong institutional buy-in from regional governments; to date, under the pilot phase, over 1,200 communities have had data entered and there is strong interest from other Central American and South American countries (World Bank, 2013).

optimism, despite the very real challenges and constraints in this area. Firstly, there was a clear recognition that it is ultimately national governments that must deliver adequate monitoring and show leadership; conversely, where this does not take place, development partners will continue to fill the gap, with piecemeal and short-term solutions. Secondly, there was a general agreement that the efforts of development partners are valid and can bring valuable lessons and piloting solutions. For NGOs with a presence in the field, there is a vital role for innovation, as well as for ‘holding up a mirror’ to the sector, and especially to governments, in a more advocacy-type role. Thirdly, there is evidence that project monitoring has already influenced government-led systems in a positive way, particularly in relation to the debate around sustainability for service provision.

However, several serious challenges constitute a caveat to these positive messages. One of them is the difficulty of overcoming organizational behaviours and incentives that are driven by accountability to development partner funders. These are powerful forces that can work against better alignment with government systems; such patterns of behaviour are often difficult to ‘unlearn’. And in many cases the desire to satisfy a demand for fast results and ever more detailed data is difficult to resist when visibility and fundraising – and therefore organizational self-preservation – are at stake.

One of the key barriers is the lack of communication and information sharing between project monitoring and national systems. Simple first steps to address when planning for project monitoring would include finding out about government systems, however limited or rudimentary they may be. Integration cannot happen without this basic first step and it is remarkable how often this step is not taken, whether through ignorance or simply through a lack of willingness to act.

A way forward towards better integration

First and perhaps foremost, it is clear that the tension between project- and country-led monitoring is both dynamic and complex, shaped by many variables; there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to facilitating better integration

and an ultimate transition to robust, comprehensive national systems. From this examination of key drivers and challenges that are shaping the way in which development partner project monitoring interfaces with country-led monitoring, we can draw a number of initial recommendations:

- When supporting project monitoring, development partners should have country ownership and country-led systems in mind *from the very beginning*; this should be associated with a diagnosis of these systems – in both the supply of and demand for information. Early and continuing communication with relevant sector authorities at national and local level is a key step in this process.
- Linked to the above, development partners should be realistic about the low-resource environment common in many countries, particularly at decentralized levels; project monitoring and innovation must fit with these financial and other capacity constraints, otherwise they are highly unlikely to be adopted or scaled up.
- The ‘governance’ and coordination of monitoring at country level are important to support effectively; how innovation and learning about monitoring are captured and fed back into country-led systems is critical. Understanding who is involved and how these processes happen are central to developing permanent capacity.
- Building comprehensive monitoring systems for a nation takes time. Long-term explicit development partner commitment – including funding – is important to engender and bolster government buy-in and leadership on monitoring, especially where there are competing demands for sector investments.
- Common programming frameworks, resulting in a SWAp or similar, are highly desirable if there is to be a critical mass around monitoring and to act as an incentive (both positive and negative) for development partners to support country-led systems.
- Development partners, particularly those working outside common programmatic approaches, should be challenged more vigorously and held to account in terms of adopting standard monitoring indicators and sharing of results.
- Efforts to strengthen country monitoring systems should be experimental and iterative, and should focus on the problem definition rather than pick from a (pre-set) menu of solutions: projects that support monitoring systems should ask first ‘What is the problem?’ rather than ‘Which solution should we adopt?’
- Government leadership and political support matter. If national sector stakeholders do not show the desire for and commitment to building country-led monitoring systems, different development partner projects and programmes will simply move to fill the vacuum left behind.
- Development partners of all types must work harder to explain why national monitoring systems are needed and should be funded and work

to change the incentives for reporting back to their headquarters or to institutional or individual (taxpaying) funders.

Endnotes

1. Many countries in Latin America have common information frameworks and approaches to data collection. Although there are fewer comprehensive systems in place in sub-Saharan Africa, this is a growing trend; for example, in Uganda (see footnote 14) and Ethiopia, where the government has established a monitoring and evaluation system with common indicators and reporting as part of the One WASH National Programme (Ministry of Water and Energy, National WASH Coordination Office, September 2012).
2. For example, only 42 per cent of respondent countries to the 2011 GLAAS country survey reported WASH sectors that are informed by reliable monitoring systems.
3. For example, the 2011 evaluation of the Paris Declaration reports only 'moderate or mixed progress' on a greater use of country systems where such systems have been made more reliable (OECD, 2011).
4. See *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.
5. See the history of the development of FLOW (Field Level Operations Watch): <http://www.waterforpeople.org/what-we-do/?gclid=CInzo_bk-cECFarKtAodHxQA1g>.
6. The strength of performance monitoring in urban areas is reflected by the growth of the International Benchmarking Network for Water and Sanitation Utilities, which now collates data from over 2,000 utilities and 85 countries: <<http://www.ib-net.org/>>.
7. For example, a recent review of the rural sector in 13 countries found only two instances, Honduras and Uganda, with sector monitoring frameworks that included both composite indicators and targets relating to sustained service provision (Lockwood and Smits, 2011).
8. A recent study looking at one municipality in Honduras found four separate forms of monitoring being carried out in one relatively small geographic area, all using somewhat different approaches (IRC 2012).
9. In 2010, the AfDB commissioned a two-part study, entitled 'Water governance sector in Africa', in which it states that 'eleven African countries are using the sector-wide approaches (SWAp) in their water sectors and many more in health or education sectors', namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda: <<http://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/article/afdb-to-launch-water-sector-governance-in-africa-report-7495/>>. Nonetheless, the extent to which some of these constitute a full SWAp may be debatable.
10. See WFP's commitment to post-project monitoring: <<http://www.waterforpeople.org/everyone/monitoring-evaluation.html>>.
11. For a reflection on the value of the sustainability clause, see: <<http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2012/08/31/hitting-the-right-note>>.

the-dgis-sustainability-clause-is-complex-but-thats-no-excuse-for-being-timid/>.

12. The Danish aid agency DANIDA first started work in support of the sector in Uganda in 1991, moving from area-based programming to broader sector support. Since 2003, DANIDA, along with other development partners, notably the UK government's Department for International Development, has been one of the key donors supporting development of the national monitoring framework and the so-called 'golden' indicators (Ssozi and Danert, 2012).
13. Personal communications with senior staff of the Department for Water Development, Ministry of Water and Environment, Government of Uganda (2012).
14. Data for the cost and scope of the UNICEF sustainability checks is from an ongoing study being undertaken by IRC and Aguaconsult on behalf of DGIS, May to June 2013.
15. A recent, wide-ranging evaluation commissioned by the Policy and Operations Evaluations Department of the Netherland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs points to major weaknesses in large-scale programmes of the World Bank and UN Habitat (IOB Evaluation, 2012: 60).
16. For a more in-depth analysis of this so-called 'country-led evaluation paradox', see the presentation by Robert Picciotto, King's College London and former director general of evaluation at the World Bank: <<http://mymande.org/content/country-led-evaluation-cle-paradox>>.

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About the authors

Harold Lockwood is director of the UK consulting agency Aguaconsult. He has extensive international experience of sector policy development, decentralization of service provision, and monitoring and evaluation. His focus in recent years has been on sustainability of WASH programmes, collaborating with a range of organizations, including national governments, donors, NGOs, foundations, and research centres. In 2013, Harold Lockwood supported IRC in an evaluation of the sustainability-contracting instrument applied by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has also carried out similar monitoring work for a range of other donors, including USAID and DFID.