Stakeholder consultation Narrative 2 2011

Report from External Learning Facilitator

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For triple-s International Workstream, IRC

Triple-S International Work Stream External Learning Facilitator

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Contents

1   Background

From the Terms of Reference:- "The International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) is leading a six-year multi-country learning initiative to improve water supply to the rural poor. Sustainable Services at Scale (Triple-S) seeks to move away from project-based, stand-alone implementation of water systems towards indefinitely sustainable rural water services delivered at scale. Working with national and international partners, Triple-S aims to bring about a re-appraisal of how development assistance to the rural water supply sector is designed and planned by both governments and developing partners.

"To achieve the above mentioned change or paradigm shift Triple-S is organised in three work streams: the Uganda work stream, the Ghana work stream and the International Work Stream (IWS) which aims to influence the policies and funding practices of international development partners to enable and support the delivery of sustainable rural water services in countries.   The aim of the International work stream's efforts is to influence development partners in three key areas relating to i) their institutional **policies,** ii) **operational practices** and iii) **funding** patterns to support the paradigm shift from infrastructure to service delivery approaches.

"The monitoring and learning in Triple-S will be documented in two narratives:

- Narrative one documents the (factors hindering or enabling) change towards sustainable service delivery at scale i.e. the content or impact of Triple-S.
- Narrative two accounts for the work of Triple-S itself; its specific way of achieving impact and change. From the recognition that there are many ways to achieve the impact of sustainable services at scale, it is important to understand if and how the way Triple-S has chosen is effective. This way has a couple of characteristics which other projects may not have or have only partially e.g. the use of learning alliances, the use of outcomes based management, the networking and working through existing systems and platforms instead of creating new project-based systems and platforms etc. Most importantly the ways of Triple-S are characterised by four values: relevance, responsiveness, creating leverage and leaving legacy (see Annex with reporting template for narrative two). This specific Triple-S way to enable the change could also be called the "theory of change of Triple-S".

"For learning and reflection about narrative two i.e. is Triple-S using the right approaches (theory of change) and is it applying these approaches well, Triple-S will contract external learning facilitators (ELF) who will support the outcomes based work streams to reflect upon and improve the way they work and enable change. These external learning facilitators have a more independent position

which is important for good and critical reflection and learning of the work stream teams. The external learning facilitators will provide inputs into the reflection process of the work streams by consulting external stakeholders or clients of the work stream and also by using its own experience and conceptual understanding of change processes; the external learning facilitators have been selected for having this experience and understanding. The reflection will take place in regular learning retreats facilitated by the external learning facilitator, where the work stream teams will be taken out of their daily operations to critically reflect and adapt their ways of working.

2   Methodology

"The specific tasks for IDS as the external learning facilitator of the International Work Stream for the planning year that will end on 31 May 2011 are:

1. To get a sufficient understanding of the monitoring and learning in Triple-S, in particular the learning that will take place in narrative two to be able to perform the role of external learning facilitator for the International Work Stream effectively and with quality

2. To consult with a maximum of ten external stakeholders or clients of the International Work Stream about the way Triple-S is enabling the change towards sustainable service delivery at scale

3. To facilitate the learning retreat of the International Work Stream team

4. To write a concept note on how IDS plans to articulate the Triple-S theory of change, which outputs will come out of this process and how these outputs will be used

"The specific outputs for this contract, to be delivered before 31 May 2011, are:

- A report with feedback from the consultation with a maximum of ten stakeholders /clients of the International Work Stream

- Facilitation of the Learning Retreat

- A programme and a report of the Learning Retreat

- A concept note on the process to articulate the theory of change, the outputs of this process and the use of these outputs

This report is the specific feedback from the first consultation of key stakeholders

Email contact and a request for a 15 minute phone interview, was made with 16 stakeholders. Stakeholder names had been provided by TripleS , and said to be key stakeholders to their current strategy. The interviewees were grouped by Ton and Harold as perceived to be 'Friendlies', 'Well

disposed' and Defensive or Hard to Reach. The designations have been removed from this report in case they cause resistance (should the report be read by a 'Defensive' and they take offence). 70% of those contacted responded affirmatively to the request for an interview, and of the remainder 20% had out of office automated emails stating they were away from their office for the weeks of the interviews. Only 10% did not respond to the email. Interestingly the absent 30% were mainly 'Friendlies' and therefore the sample is skewed in its distribution (purposive sampling) towards the 'defensive' or 'hard to reach'.

8 full interviews were conducted. Supplemental partial interviews were undertaken with 4 stakeholders in the water sector at a conference.   The interviews were free ranging based on 3 simple questions – supplemented with discussion dependent on the answers.

- Were you aware of the TripleS programme of work (either by its name or by awareness of IRC) before this email (that invited them for an interview – ed).
- If yes, how would you describe the emphasis of the TripleS programme? (they talk of 'Service Delivery' however you may have articulated it differently from your discussions with them).
- If yes to question 1, to what extent has the TripleS team offered something (evidence, research, argument, persuasiveness) over and above other consultants/researchers that pass through your office?
- If no to question 1, then could you please tell me what you think the key issues facing the rural water supply sector are, in brief.

These questions led into a discussion and interesting points made were followed up.

Interviewees were told interviews were confidential and non-attributable, therefore quotes are given verbatim but are non-attributable.

3   Findings

The following section presents the findings of the interviews with the purposive sample. It attempts to report their opinions and statements without value comment from the authors. Observations and summaries are made in the subsequent section.

3.1 About TripleS

The majority of those contacted had heard of TripleS. Only one of those approached at a conference had not heard of it.

Of those that had heard, most could articulate that TripleS was focused on Rural Water Supplies, that it was funded by Gates Foundation, and that it was hosted at IRC. Where principal names were volunteered, Harold Lockwood featured highly, and in a few cases Ton Schouten was mentioned.

To some, particularly two key stakeholders, TripleS was described as a research programme. "*TripleS is basically a research programme*"; "*TripleS is research orientated in its approach*". In addition while others did not directly state that TripleS was a research programme, they implicitly suggested they were expecting research type information from TripleS.

To others the emphasis was on the communication aspects of the programme. None of the respondents used the word advocacy in their description of TripleS however they made statements such as "*TripleS brings communication rather than action*".

Associated with the acknowledgement that TripleS was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation were a number of value for money comments made. "*TripleS is the best resourced programme ever*"; "*Ton of money, Ton of time*". From several respondents there was a clear expectation that TripleS was going to (or should) 'make a difference' due to the resources available to it. One person noted explicitly that failure to illustrate that difference by the end of the programme would be shameful.

3.2 About TripleS added Value

The conversations sought to move from this opening introduction to explore what the respondents saw as the key added value of TripleS programme.
Some respondents avoided the idea of added value and sought to associate their own activities with the programme. One noted "*Our approach is completely concurrent with TripleS*"

Two respondents stated that Harold Lockwood was the key added value. Harolds experience was noted and that he presented as a valuable asset to the sector in his measured and experienced voice. "Harold Lockwood! – good experience"

Two returned to the value for money idea. "We are expecting a lot from TripleS (with all that money)". They and others also stated that they were waiting for clarity on the key added value. "We are waiting with bated breath"; "The key message is not yet completely articulated". This idea of waiting for a clear message was intertwined with acknowledgements about the complexity of the problems. "TripleS is facing huge problems and barriers"; "Just one part of a very complex problem"; "Such huge problems need different approaches". And for one this complexity and waiting added up to low expectations of the programme "They haven't really done anything to give me a lot of hope for the future".

The need for clarity of 'solutions' was developed in some interviews. Three respondents could articulate the need for sustainability and that TripleS had the right focus in respect to Rural water supplies. One noted that TripleS was drawing people to a "Focus on sustainability – people focus on getting results, not enough on sustainability". Another though questions this focus as an 'added value' as TripleS were articulating problems that were well known before its existence, "TripleS is articulating the 'Myths of Rural water supply' which pre dates it" – this came across as both a confirmation of the need for the programme and a backhanded slapdown! The sentiment was echoed by another respondent "TripleS is just talking the same thing but different framing"

Exploring this led to a very clear message from 5 respondents that sanitation is almost more important than rural water supply. One stated clearly that "TripleS has a weakness in not tackling sanitation". Two noted the strength of the CLTS approach and one of these two specifically hoped that "We need solutions – something like CLTS but for rural water"

Regarding the models TripleS is promoting, one pointed to the 'Uganda Forum' (which is assumed to be Kampala 2010) which brought together models that worked.

3.3   Issues more generally
When exploring what are the top of the mind issues in the water sector, the responses cluster around three subjects:-

Sustainability of rural water supplies
Some felt that most rural water supplies were now community managed but with the absence of strong supply chains they could not maintain supplies.

This often expressed itself in terms of a brief but community focused discussion on Life Cycle costs. Respondents talked about how to 'recover money' from communities , about having a regular tariff and how the whole idea of post installation care requires community buy-in. For instance one organization felt that they 'were the community' and they expected there to be money up front and ongoing.

A few articulated that sustainability was a key word when reporting to their donors, and that sustainability cuts across 'programme effectiveness', i.e. if a supply is not sustainable then the organisation should not claim any effectiveness.

Sometimes in the context of sanitation, but at other times in the context of rural water supplies, many talked about behaviour change. Change in the communities, change in the people in local government, even private sector. In this narrative on behaviour change there was a lament that 'Governments cannot do behaviour change'.

Organisational responses

Many noted their own challenges in their organisation. Monitoring and Evaluation featured highly, particularly where it intersected with behavioural change (often in the context of sanitation). Some felt M&E was neglected, while others felt that M&E was a difficult challenge.   In this narrative people seemed at various times to be talking about accuracy in knowing which supplies are still working, about the penetration – were the marginalised being reached, and about behavioural change.

One respondent noted that their organisation was trying to catch up on lost ground, that in the move towards taking account of the social factors that surround water supplies they had actually lost all their technical expertise. They were currently trying to restore the balance, to restore their inhouse technical expertise..

Several organisations discussed their advocacy work. They talked about seeking policy wide impacts and noted that they needed to engage in advocacy at many different levels to achieve change.

Sanitation

Many of the respondents brought up the importance of sanitation stating that it would give greater health gains than clean water per se.

Only one respondent focused on the need for **new** technologies. In their narrative they championed a requirement for low cost technology – both additional ones and demonstrations of existing ones.

3.4   About Service Delivery Approach

"Service Delivery Approach…..Hmmm"

Following on the conversation about general issues and the added value of the programme, specific enquiries were made about the service delivery approach.

Some made humour about the SDA. The impression was that none actually meant they did not know what SDA was, but played on the breadth of the approach and its meaning slightly different things to different people. "SDA meaning what?"; "SDA is confusing – means provision"

Again several sought to align themselves with the approach. "In the way they talk SDA the language resonates with us"; "Emerging thinking is the SDA"; "Our approach is always set in a integrated community response"; "The topic is very relevant".   As the conversation progressed in some cases it seemed that SDA was seen as synonymous with a community approach. In this community view of SDA one respondent stated "Our organisation is the community and therefore we always have an SDA approach"   In these conversations the weakness of community capacity was acknowledged, and that new strategies for empowering the communities to take care of rural water supplies was required. "Communities must get involved".

One respondent noted "Urban water is managed by specialists, in the case of rural water supplies we expect amateurs to manage it!". This same respondent stated "An emerging strategy for us is to have 'competent managers' for rural water supplies"; "Capacity is the really big problem".

It is interesting to note that these sentiments directly echo the Multi Country Study about to be published. In the study the draft shared with us states:- 'Professionalisation of community management' Community management must be properly embedded in, and supported by, policy, legal and regulatory frameworks and support services, both at national and local levels; in order to become more effective community-based management entities must be legally! recognised.

Some were able to articulate that SDA was more than supporting the community. One said this explicitly while others made statements such as "SDA is a tripartite between Private sector, Govt and

Community"; "SDA really contrasts with the project approach". This led on to a number of observations about the private sector. "Private sector is neglected"; "Private sector is often ignored"

Again these sentiments echo the multi country study - Increased recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options There is a range of different management options beyond community-based management – including local private operators – that can better support different service levels, technology and types of settlements; these should be described and set out in clear service delivery models which are well disseminated.

[It may be worth noting that in one conversation when the Private Sector was raised by the interviewer, the respondent interpreted that sector as a mechanism for raising long term financial support for rural water supplies]

In this engagement of local government one respondent noted that in their experience that the "Ghana government has been very helpful, developed plans jointly and linked local authority with local committee".

Some respondents returned to the question of sanitation contrasting it with the needs of the rural water supplies. "Sanitation is the key problem now"; "Investment in sanitation will do a lot more for health"; "Education in sanitation should be part of an SDA approach"

Others approached the problem from a different angle. They saw the key as being in Rights Based approach. They saw that communities needed to demand their rights from Government. "Rights based approaches are important"; "Getting people to demand from the Government is a key barrier". This narrative was mixed with the questions around who has access – are we reaching all rural areas and within those rural areas are all people being served.

The private sector and rights based demanding from the government were intertwined in several narratives. People stated that creating demand in a community is important, and enabling them with the capacity to negotiate with the private sector and government is important. Two people noted that "rural water supply is best done at the local level", meaning a demand driven by the community. Although one noted: "At scale does the government has the contracting capacity".

A few voices were dismissive of SDA. The call was for less discussion and more focus "Focus on getting the job done – get water flowing". Sceptism about the scale of the problem raised it head "How can it be done at scale – we need a solution"; "TripleS is just talking the same thing but different framing"

4   (TripleS) Stakeholders

Given the above views on issues, TripleS and SDA in particular, the conversation explored which stakeholders the respondents thought that TripleS should focus on.

In analysing the possible stakeholders, the respondents clearly agreed that a focus on the Banks was a good strategy. In a more nuanced analysis, a number of respondents used the language of 'preaching to the Choir' – which is a common expression but we note is language used by Harold when briefing – it may be coincidence, or it may be that this common phraseology is an indicator how some of the respondents and TripleS are communicating effectively.

Three respondents talked about the sector having a Choir that were converted to the ideas behind SDA (although not always by that name). Those people they agreed needed models, to learn how best to apply the principles behind SDA, to have demonstrations of case studies where it working well. Respondents (both those who used the Choir language and others who spoke in general terms) felt that there were those who thought they were the Choir but actually were not. Some of these brought out the difference between an SDA approach and a community orientation – and felt that some people saw the two approaches as synonymous. Others felt the 'unsinging Choir' were people who subscribed to the ideas but had failed to get their organisations to implement the ideas. In both cases the solution seemed to be that the 'unsinging Choir' needed to realise that SDA was about a mindset change, that it was a shift away from projects to a life cycle approach.

The above respondents then felt there were others who were just sceptical of SDA and that they believed SDA was a utopian approach that could never be achieved.

5   External Communication

So in this attempt to reach the Choir, 'unsinging Choir' and sceptics, did the respondents have any advice for TripleS?

There was conflicting advice on whether to state their case at specialist new events they organise, or at the existing plethora of conferences. "TripleS should use its money to host new Fora for

discussing this"; "TripleS should ensure it joins in with existing For a"; "TripleS shouldn't convene but should just use regular conferences". Those suggesting new Fora stated that they existing Fora are often so crowded that they don't have the time allocated for discussing details. This respondent felt that getting to the details was important. They also felt that the semi closed door sessions organised by TripleS added considerable value to the discussions. One person felt that everyone in the closed sessions was in the Choir, and noted that a mixed method approach was going to be necessary. However whichever the approach a common sentiment was "The more people engaged in debates the better".

Some respondents wanted more documentation. They suggested that TripleS develop guidelines for implementing SDA. Another respondent felt the key was stories of change. Stories were in their view very influential.

Regarding the interaction with the Development Banks, some respondents noted that they themselves had very limited interaction with the Banks and so if TripleS had the ear of the Banks it should really leverage this connection. "We really support the idea of a group engaging the WB and AfDB"; "Important to link up with the Banks to share their ideas"; "Get the research in front of the major investors ie the Banks"

6   Observations from Stakeholder interviews

'To consult with a maximum of ten external stakeholders or clients of the International Work Stream about the way Triple-S is enabling the change towards sustainable service delivery at scale'

6.1   On TripleS added value

Overall there was an impression that :-

- There was an awareness of TripleS
- There was a general awareness that TripleS was focusing on Rural Water Supplies
- There was an awareness that it was a Gates Funded programme

People were not clear as to the actual mandate of TripleS and whether it was a 'research' programme. And there were high expectations regarding 'value for money'.

This value for money idea flowed into the conversations about added value. The interviewer often phrased the question as 'what added value does your interaction with TripleS bring, over and above any other consultant that passes through you office.' There were no clear answers to this question.

Most respondents drifted off into monologues about the need for sustainability, and that the problems of water supply are well known. As an impression, a lot seemed to hoping for a 'solution'. What is the one thing that needs to be done to make Rural Water Supplies sustainable? Who has the mega bright idea? – and in some cases they are looking to triples to have that solution.

This desire for 'simple' solutions is human nature, but it also speaks to headlines and branding. Has TripleS got its 'sales pitch' sorted out. The documentation suggests that this is in process, but has been relatively late coming – a simple visual storyline to put in front of people. It does not seem that TripleS needs to work to convince people of the problems. They need to be shown solutions.

At the same time I acknowledge that there are no simple solutions and that it is a complex situation. (If there were simple solutions people would probably have latched on to them already). The life cycle cost was not brought up by people and this seems to me a potentially sticky message that could be exploited a bit more. Perhaps the tie up with WASHCOST could help.

So what are the takeaways from the discussions of 'Added Value'?
- Ensure there is a straight forward storyline for what your programme is focused on – explain that it includes research but that it is an enabling programme.
- Create a visual storyline that the more visual memories can remember.
- Tackle this idea of a 'solution' head on – either bundle your ideas into a solution storyline, or create a storyline that explains why there is no solution and its unlikely there ever will be.

6.2   Community approach = SDA?

Our understanding is that SDA is much more than an approach which focuses on the community and engaging the community to maintain and take care of their own rural water supply.

In some of the conversations SDA seemed to be synonymous with the community approach, and where NGOs were engaged with the community they saw no need for 'SDA'. I don't think these people were resistant per se to a wider perspective, but that because of their background and institution, their focus in their work, they had conflated SDA down to 'Community'.

It might be worth tackling this issue head on – produce some briefing notes that explain the difference more directly – in the language on 'NGO people speak'. What do we mean by this last phrase – the respondents who gave me these impressions were from NGOs not from the Banks or

UN agencies. They have their own way of framing issues, and any briefing notes should take into account their language and institutional culture.

6.3   Sanitation

Our understanding is that TripleS has asked itself the question 'should we be including or discussing sanitation?' and decided that it should not. On the other hand the merger of Washcost with TripleS holds new opportunities in this realm. The merger document states "WASHCost also includes sanitation and hygiene in rural and peri-urban areas, which are interrelated issues."

As documented in the findings, several of the respondents in different contexts of the conversation said words to the effect that sanitation was the key issue, that health gains are made by tackling sanitation and both implicitly and explicitly that TripleS should include sanitation in its remit.

Given your decision not to include it, and yet its presence in Washcost, we suggest you should include sanitation in your storylines, even if only to acknowledge its role and state that Rural water supplies are as important.

6.4   African Development Bank

One of the respondents described the emerging thinking within the African Development Bank. They stated that there was a shift going on within the organization and that the Service Delivery Approach was an emerging concept. Whilst difficult to reach, it would seem that a focused mini strategy on the African Development Bank might find fertile ground for change.

6.5   Unsinging Choir?

The comments about stakeholders were interesting. As already pointed out in the findings, the language of 'preaching to the Choir' was used by several people. This could be because they picked it up from Harold and Ton, or it could be vice versa. However, the nalaogy does seem quite useful and mirrors our own breakdown of friendlies, well disposed and defensive and hard to reach. Both TripleS and respondents seem to agree that the Choir needs examples and models to help them turn their ideas into practice. The hook up with WASHCOST might well assist in this process.

However, the idea of a group who think they are in the Choir but are not singing, or singing off key, seems a helpful focus but is perhaps difficult to challenge. It seems that this idea that community is

synonymous with SDA will need direct challenging. Briefing notes drawing out the difference, and written in the language of the NGO might find a ready audience.

6.6   To hold a meeting or not to hold a meeting?

It is interesting that there was effectively a balanced response – those who think you should hold specific events (mainly because the larger events don't have time for in depth discussion), and those who think you should just join in with existing events. A mixed method approach is the easy answer – but it doesn't help focus your use of a limited budget.

Given the invocacy strategy, it would seem that it deciding whether to attend an event or not should be held against the plumbline of whether the key targets are there. And if there are not enough events with enough space to discuss things in detail then, depending on budget, there may be space for arranging special meetings.

6.7   Tipping point

There was a limited sense that the industry might move towards SDA with or without TripleS. The referrals back to the 'Myths' and to their own organisations having emerging strategies of SDA. The role then of TripleS is to accelerate this trend. Like any innovation process there will be early adopters, the mainstream and late adopters. It is clear from the discussion about the Choir that the friendlies are potential early adopters. However each organisation has many layers and there is a challenge to support the entrepreneurial champions identified by the invocacy strategy to take their message throughout their own organisations and even to other players in the sector. Coalitions are a traditional way to bring together Champions and create a momentum or network across different organisations that support change within organisations. Individual champions within large multilaterals will soon lose energy when trying to change the working practice of an organisation – they need the support of others outside the organisation.

6.8   Organisational Change

We note from the respondents that some acknowledged the difficulties of organisational change. For instance the respondent who noted that SDA was emerging as a theme also stated that this process was very slow. The respondent who noted that their organisation had lost a lot of their technical capability lamented that it was difficult to redirect the organisation.

It may be worth considering specific discussions on how to change organisations. We need to acknowledge that those who rise to management in a water orientated organisation tend to have an expertise in the water sector. They do not necessarily have expertise in organisational change.

Tying some ideas of SDA to specific cases of how an organisation changed to incorporate SDA might be appropriate.

At the learning retreat we came to learn that there was initially a proposal specifically for an organisational change expert. While the full time position may not be relevant, we believe that some consultancy would be worthwhile.

6.9   Age and Retirement!

It was notable that many of the respondents, due to their seniority, were in the latter half of their working career. Given that it takes a long time for ideas or memes to spread throughout a sector, we wonder whether a focus on top management (for invocacy) is sufficiently robust. In each mini strategy there needs to be a range of stakeholders and Champions who are old and influential, and young and emerging.

7   Conclusions

These findings feed into the ongoing work of the External Learning Facilitator. We used these findings at the learning retreat, and the resulting discussion has been documented in the Learning Retreat Report.