

# Achieving sustainable rural water supplies at scale: a principle-based approach

## Introduction

Triple-S is a six year multi-country learning initiative that will contribute to addressing the challenge of sustainability of rural water supply. This is the **vision of Triple-S: sustainable rural water services at scale**. To achieve this vision means shifting from a focus on constructing infrastructure under projects or programmes towards the delivery of services that can be supported and sustained indefinitely. This shift has implications both for government and other national stakeholders – who must take an increasing leadership role – as well as for development partners, who must move from a fragmented and competing way of working to a more coordinated and harmonised approach to supporting government-led priorities.

*“The principle framework was very useful in helping CWSA analyse the policy gaps for Service Delivery Approach (SDA) and agreeing on measures to put in place as part of project design and implementation for long-term sustainability of facilities”. -Mr. RKD Van Ess, immediate past Director of Technical Services, CWSA*

*“The principle framework has provided a frame for keeping planning for sustainable services focused. It is an approach that builds on best practices globally, without reinventing the wheel. It helps in promoting team work which is focused on comparative advantage and strength”. -Mr. John Nkum, External Learning facilitator of Triple-S Ghana workstream*

## Delivering the vision of sustainable rural water services at scale

We recognise that achieving this is a complex challenge and that many constraints need to be addressed – budget limitations, competing government choices inside and outside the sector, political interference and corruption, and the individual agendas of aid agencies and donors. Water services are often context specific, affected by culture, history, economy, politics, water resources, topography and demographic aspects. There is no single blueprint for success which can describe institutional frameworks, policies, service delivery models or technologies. What works in one place, may not work in another. However, we do know from long experience that a number of important elements need to be in place to lead to more sustainable service delivery. At the highest level, we can identify three main **pillars** which are essential to achieve the vision of sustainable rural water services at scale; these are elaborated in the box below.

The **three pillars** to achieve the vision of sustainable rural water services at scale:

- 1. Applying a service delivery approach** is the first pillar for achieving our vision, whereby the focus of the sector moves from simply building infrastructure to providing a water service that can be maintained over time; this means putting in place the policies, institutions, planning, financing and governance of the sector all support water services at scale for rural populations.
- 2. Supporting a strong learning and adaptive capacity for water service delivery** is the second pillar. There is no short-cut to sustainability, but with the ability to learn, innovate and adapt to changing circumstances and demands, national WASH sectors will be better prepared to support a service delivery approach for rural populations well into the future.
- 3. Harmonisation and alignment for water service delivery** is the final pillar. Harmonisation between donors, along with better coordination and alignment to support government-led strategies for more effective service delivery to rural people.

## A principles-based approach

Triple-S has identified a range of **principles**, which are considered of universal importance to achieving sustainable rural water services at scale. These principles are based on a wide range of experience and learning over many years. To apply these in practice in different country contexts we have developed a corresponding **Principles Framework** where each of the eight different principles is set out. We also identify different functional levels in the sector; namely **consumers, water service providers, service authorities** (generally local or district government), **national government** and **international development partners**. The Principles Framework therefore consists of a matrix which cross-references each principle at the five different levels of intervention to describe the ideal scenario, or situation, under which we consider sustainable rural water services at scale to be achievable.

Other principle-based frameworks have been developed in recent years, which have addressed one or more of these levels, such as WaterAid<sup>1</sup>, the Community Management Scaling up Group<sup>2</sup> and for multiple-use services<sup>3</sup>. The Principles Framework of Triple-S expands on this work, outlining requirements at all levels, thereby highlighting the inter-connectivity of both problems and solutions. The framework purposefully does not prescribe the details or how changes should be made, or who should make the changes. This is the work of stakeholders and individuals in each particular country context with responsibility to apply the principles. The framework in short, it is both a guide and an assessment or planning tool.

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<sup>1</sup> WaterAid (2011) Sustainability framework: [http://www.wateraid.org/documents/sustainability\\_framework\\_final.pdf](http://www.wateraid.org/documents/sustainability_framework_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Scaling Up Group. 2005. *Scaling up rural water supply; A framework for achieving sustainable universal coverage through community management*. Thematic Group Scaling Up Rural Water Services. Delft, the Netherlands. [www.scalingup.watsan.net/page/186](http://www.scalingup.watsan.net/page/186)

<sup>3</sup> Koppen, B. van; Smits, S.; Moriarty, P.; Penning de Vries, F.; Mikhail, M.; Boelee, E. (2009). *Climbing the Water Ladder: Multiple-use water services for poverty reduction*. The Hague, The Netherlands, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and International Water Management Institute. (TP series; no. 52)

**Table 1: The Triple-S Principles Framework**

<b>Pillars</b>	<b>Principles</b>	<b>Application of principles</b>
<b>Service delivery approach</b>	Policy, legislation and institutional roles are clarified for commonly agreed on service delivery models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service delivery models (involving both infrastructure and management arrangements) and expected service levels for point source and networks are clear</li> <li>• Institutional roles and responsibilities are established and authority to act is granted, including asset ownership</li> </ul>
	Financing for full life-cycle costs are effectively covered through an agreed upon combination of tariffs, taxes and transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full life-cycle costs should be understood at all levels</li> <li>• Full life-cycle costs of service delivery reflected through a combination of tariffs, taxes and transfers</li> <li>• An improved balance between capital investment and all other recurrent and capital maintenance costs</li> </ul>
	Planning aims for full coverage and accounts for the different stages of the life-cycle of the service and is based on participatory processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent and inclusive planning, involving consumers at different stages in the life-cycle of the service (including technology selection)</li> <li>• Planning based on life-cycles and involve asset management; where possible seeking to maximise economies of scale</li> <li>• Planning always with the aim of full coverage and to be directed by clear national policy and prioritisation</li> </ul>
	Transparency and accountability mechanisms are in place between consumers, service providers and independent oversight bodies over the quality and sustainability of services provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability mechanisms should be in place for stakeholders, including customers having access to information and being able to hold service providers to account,</li> <li>• Monitoring and regulatory instruments should be in place to ensure accountability against an agreed set of indicators; indicators should focus on outcomes rather than outputs.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning and self-sustaining capacity</b>	Capacity (awareness, skills, resources, and access to support) exists within the sector for stakeholders to fulfil their functions, as defined in the service delivery model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumers should be aware of their roles, rights and obligations.</li> <li>• Skills, resources (including supply chains) and information should be available for good water governance, including long-term support to service providers and service authorities.</li> <li>• Capacity should be strengthened at all levels</li> <li>• Leadership should be provided at a national level</li> </ul>
	The sector has the ability to learn and innovate on the basis of knowledge sharing, reflection and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanisms should be in place for learning from performance monitoring and sharing with peers.</li> <li>• There should be a learning culture and adequate resources made available for monitoring, information gathering, research and innovation (including technology and management arrangements)</li> </ul>
<b>Harmonisation and alignment</b>	Sector investment and support is harmonised and aligned with national priorities and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All stakeholders should operate within commonly agreed national guidelines and service delivery models</li> <li>• Development partners should harmonise approaches and align with national priorities and frameworks</li> </ul>
	Actions of stakeholders are coordinated at different levels with commonly recognised platforms and fora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination should be done for information sharing, effective planning and creating economies of scale</li> <li>• Funding flows and policies in the sector should be coordinated at national and international level</li> </ul>

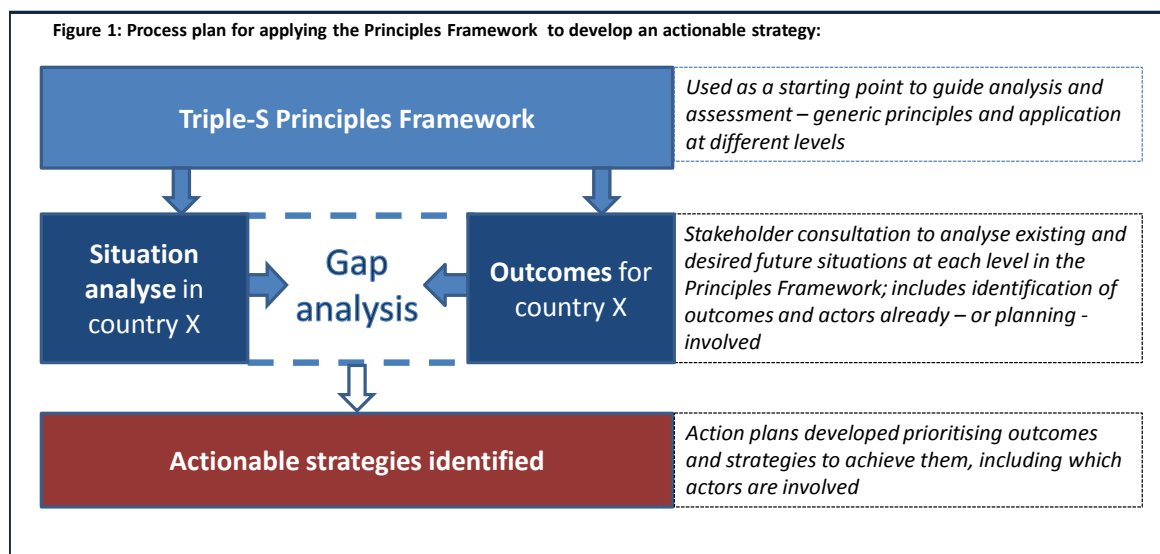
A more comprehensive version of the Principles Framework is available which gives further details for each type of stakeholder working at specific levels and providing different functions. This includes the full matrix of 40 cells (8 principles x 5 levels of application) and are available at:

<http://www.waterservicesthatlast.org/Resources/Concepts-tools/Principles-for-sustainable-services>

## Using the Principles Framework to produce actionable strategies

The Principles Framework was initially produced to be used by stakeholders in Triple-S' action research in **Ghana** and **Uganda**. It has also been used in other countries, for instance it was recently employed to carry out a sector analysis in **Honduras** by the Water and Sanitation Network (RASHON) to assess the main constraints to sector development.

On the basis of these experiences, we can see that the Principles Framework can be used in various ways. It can be used as a guidance tool to generate **dialogue** and **awareness**, as well as to **inspire** stakeholders in finding solutions to the problems facing them at different levels. It can be used as an **analytical tool** for the sector and can also be used as a **planning tool** to highlight important interventions that can address existing gaps and weaknesses in the sector. Because it is an integrated matrix one of its main strengths is to show the importance of working in a holistic way; the corollary of this is that addressing only one issue or 'silver bullet' solution is unlikely to achieve adequate results because of the complexity of the sector and the multiple underlying causes of poor sustainability. Instead it encourages working on several fronts at different levels to achieve meaningful change and involves developing an overall strategic plan to develop country-specific outcomes involving government ministries, decentralised agencies, officials from local government, NGOs, development partners and researchers.



## Using the Triple-S Principles Framework in Ghana

A rigorous consultation process was followed involving stakeholders from all levels of the water sector in Ghana to use the Principles Framework to develop an overall strategy; this included representatives from: Ministry of Water Resources and Works and Housing; Community Water and Sanitation Agency; District Assemblies; Regional level authorities; water service providers; NGOs; and consultants in the water sector.

Using a series of guiding questions, a country-specific situational analysis was developed using the Principles Framework as a guide. Future outcomes were identified which resulted in all stakeholders, including development partners, to agree and comply with a 'one Ghana water service delivery approach', including policies, planning, financing and institutional arrangements for water services governance and implementation. Actionable strategic plans were then produced and are being followed both by Triple-S and other partners.

This example illustrates the **principle** of transparency and accountability applied at the **level** of the service authority, which in the Ghana context sits with the District Authorities

