Reflections on monitoring a large-scale civil society WASH initiative: lessons for sector monitoring and potential contributions from NGOs

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Abstract

This paper draws on the experience of monitoring a large-scale civil society Fund to provide insight into some of the challenges facing sector monitoring and how non-governmental organisations (NGOs) might play roles to support government in developing and implementing such systems. Structured reflection was undertaken by the Monitoring Review Panel, authors of this paper, who had oversight of the monitoring arrangements of this AusAID Fund that covered 20 countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. The reflection addressed two areas: (i) innovative aspects and key success factors that held relevance for sector monitoring, and (ii) use of a 'strategy map' to consider the ways in which NGOs are currently, and might in the future, support sector monitoring. The findings were that an explicit learning focus, use of models to conceptualise 'theories of change' and a well-structured performance framework that balanced prescription with flexibility were innovative and important elements that should be replicated in sector monitoring. Two key success factors were also attributed to the purpose-built, simple yet effective information system and a strong 'people' focus to the monitoring arrangements and how people understand and use information. Concerning potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring, a range of roles and strategies were identified. These ranged from sharing localised monitoring information or building local skills for monitoring to supporting local government, service providers or schools with the necessary skills and capacity. Additional potential roles that address the broader environment included leading advocacy efforts to generate demand for sector monitoring, documenting and sharing their own learning on WASH monitoring, and supporting multi-stakeholder sector coordination groups to demand, develop, implement or use sector monitoring systems. We conclude that there is significant learning potential from donor-funded monitoring to inform sector monitoring and that

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NGOs have some useful and valuable roles they might seek to take up to support the critical need for improved sector monitoring.

Keywords

Introduction and purpose

Sector monitoring is a critical but challenging task, particularly to ensure it moves beyond data collection to include mechanisms for analysis, use and learning. And whilst governments remain responsible for developing such systems, other actors, including non-governmental organisations, can play important roles.

The purpose of this paper is to distil important lessons from monitoring a donor-funded civil society water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiative, including insights about both 'what' was monitored and 'how' monitoring arrangements were constructed and implemented. In particular, we highlight lessons of specific relevance to the development of sector monitoring systems by national governments.

A secondary purpose is to provide a typology of potential roles for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support sector monitoring, given the critical importance of well-functioning monitoring systems for overall sector development, and the potential leverage points and skills NGOs have to offer.

This paper is based on the authors' experience monitoring a large-scale civil society water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiative that comprised 45 projects across 21 countries. It is written for an audience of programme designers (both NGOs and donors), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialists and government sector staff concerned with establishing government sector monitoring.

Context

The Civil Society Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (hereafter, the "Fund") of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) that forms the basis for this paper comprised 45 projects implemented by 11 civil society organisations (all of whom were NGOs) across 21 countries totalling AUD32.5m during 2009-2012. An overview of the Fund and its key outcomes are shown in Figures 1 and 2 respectively.

Figure 1: Overview of the Fund and its focus countries.
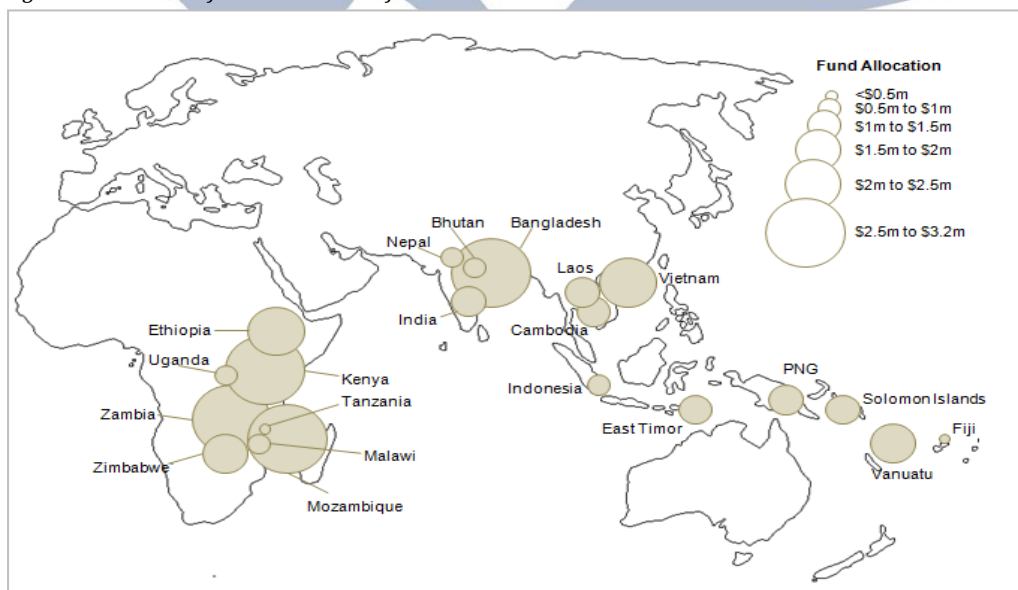
Source: AusAID Independent Completion Report (Willetts et al. 2012).

Figure 2: Aggregate achievements of the Fund.

1.	Increased access to safe water and basic sanitation	782,388 people gained access to basic sanitation (of which 523,548 people gained access to *improved sanitation* using MDG measure/JMP definition).
		730 villages and 8 slums declared open defecation free (ODF)[4].
		563,602 people gained access to safe water (of which 508,223 people gained access to *improved water* using MDG measure/JMP definition).
2.	Improved hygiene behaviour	76,741 additional households and schools in which hand-washing is practised (according to proxy: locations with hand-washing facilities and soap).
		516 schools gained access to water, sanitation and/or hand-washing facilities.
3.	Improved sustainability of services	80 significant outcomes were achieved that contributed to an improved enabling environment for WASH services for the poor. These outcomes related to improved governance and voice of the poor; improved local capacity to plan, manage and maintain services; improved private sector capacity; advances in gender equality; and contributions to the WASH evidence base. 47% of WASH committee members were women (a minimum of 30% was considered desirable).
	Main beneficiaries	2,322,039 people (80% rural and 20% in informal urban settlements) including more than 270 people with disabilities. Beneficiaries were women and men in remote island communities, slums, remote rural communities, geographic areas under stress (e.g. flood prone, desert, disaster affected), poor communities living on less than $1/day, 'hardcore poor' class, and ethnic minority groups.
	Investment focus	Sanitation (36%), water (46%) and hygiene (18%)

Source AusAID Independent Completion Report , Willetts et al. 2012.

AusAID established a three-member Monitoring Review Panel (MRP) for the duration of the Fund to support both accountability and learning. The MRP comprised the authors

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[4] The number of communities is an estimate since some CSOs reported in 'numbers of communities' and others in terms of the population. An average community size of 1,500 was used to allow aggregation against this indicator.

of this paper and its role was to develop comprehensive monitoring arrangements for the Fund. The MRP's terms of reference included:

1. Development of a performance assessment framework (PAF) and related reporting requirements.
2. Provision of support to NGOs to improve quality of their monitoring and evaluation.
3. Desk and field monitoring of implementation including independent mid-term and completion reviews.

Activities under the Fund were implemented during a period of 17 months. The MRP was in place for 24 months and represented an investment of about 2-3% of the overall Fund worth $32.5.[5] NGOs undertook the data collection in relation to their programmes, and analysis across the 45 projects was undertaken by the MRP. NGOs reported on 'expected outcomes' at the outset and compared these with 'actual outcomes' reported at end-of-programme, and in-between provided 6-monthly progress reports that tracked their 'deliverables'.

Monitoring a large-scale 'programme' such as this Fund has commonalities with sector monitoring, hence forms a useful learning ground to inform sector monitoring. For instance, monitoring arrangements had to be applicable to, and to synthesise, diverse projects and activities (with varying geography, demographics, sizes and scope), a similar challenge to that faced in monitoring at national-scale. In addition, reflecting on how the participating NGOs supported sector monitoring systems in their target countries; or how they might have sought to do so, yields important insights and is the subject of the latter part of this paper.

Methodology

The methodology used to develop this paper was structured critical reflection by the MRP on the monitoring arrangements for the Fund and insights it provides for sector monitoring. This structured reflection addressed the following three questions:

1. What was innovative about the Fund monitoring arrangements that could inform sector monitoring?
2. What key success factors of the Fund monitoring arrangements are also relevant to sector monitoring?
3. What types of support could NGOs provide to development of national monitoring systems?

This paper is focused on double-loop learning and thus rather than describe the complete details of the monitoring arrangements for the Fund or the results of that monitoring, we purposefully focus on what was learnt about the 'process' of designing

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[5] This cost covers the MRP in the roles explained above, all analysis undertaken of the Fund and the Fund information system. It does not include costs incurred by NGOs in data collection and reporting.

and implementing such a monitoring system for a large-scale donor-funded initiative. In contrast to single-loop learning, which is repeated attempts at the same problem (without variation of method or questioning the goal), double-loop learning, a term coined by Chris Arygis, involves critical reflection on the goal itself and the worldviews and assumptions on which is it based (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Further information about the Fund itself and its monitoring arrangements are detailed in Willetts et al. (2011) and Willetts et al. (2012).

Findings and discussion

The sections below address the three areas of reflection on the Fund, namely innovative aspects of the Fund monitoring arrangements, success factors of these arrangements, and insight into potential roles for NGOs to support sector monitoring.

What was innovative about the monitoring arrangements?

Three key aspects of the monitoring arrangements were innovative and offer important insights for designing sector monitoring, since they are often absent from such systems. These include:

1. An explicit 'learning' focus.
2. Use of models to conceptualise the 'theory of change'.
3. A well-structured PAF that balanced prescription with flexibility.

Each is discussed in turn below, including recommendations for action.

Explicit 'learning' focus: It is well-understood in the sector that 'learning' is a key element of a shift to a service delivery approach. For instance, Lockwood and Smits (2011) included a 'learning and adaptive capacity' as one of the key principles supporting a service delivery approach, and point to the role of international development partners to support "*development of learning and innovation capacity in the water sector*" (Lockwood and Smits, 2011, p177). Learning is also a key element of good M&E (Woodhill et al., 2005), and the MRP were committed to promoting double-loop learning and fostering a curiosity within NGO staff to question if and how their approaches were working (or not) and how their M&E information might help them answer such questions.

The MRP took a 'developmental evaluation' approach to its role. Developmental evaluation is a term coined by Patton (2011) to guide the adaptation of evaluation (or indeed, monitoring) to "*emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments*" (Patton, 2011, p1). This evaluation approach recognises that environments where "*what to do to solve problems is uncertain and key stakeholders are in conflict about how to proceed*" (Patton, 2011, p1) require new thinking. Specifically, these environments require the use of evaluative questions, and "*gathering real-time data to inform on-going decision-making and adaptations*" (Patton, 2011, p1). WASH interventions in developing countries typically take place in such complex environments, and hence both

programme monitoring and sector monitoring must be evolved to engage with this complexity.

Hence whilst some aspects of the monitoring utilised traditional approaches to M&E (for example, asking NGOs to predict expected outputs and outcomes and measuring achievement against these), the monitoring arrangements also included elements that correspond with a developmental evaluation approach. These included requesting descriptive free-form case studies, use of numerous evaluative questions (in addition to specific indicators) within the PAF, contribution to Fund 'learning events', one-on-one engagement between evaluators and NGOs throughout the duration of the Fund - including field monitoring with substantial feedback provided to NGOs both on effective WASH approaches and on M&E itself. The MRP also developed synthesis reports and learning documents to provide timely feedback to NGOs on learning emerging from across the Fund. The MRP also led two large-scale evaluations of the fund at mid-term and completion, which synthesised information from across the programme, reflected back lessons to the NGOs, and was able to produce aggregated information such as that presented earlier in Figure 2. For example, one such report was a learning paper analysing how NGOs were working to support government systems. An independent review found these efforts to be "useful for both CSOs and AusAID" and three NGOs reported these "as something they appreciated most about the MRP, as they promoted broader reflection on their activities" (AusAID, 2012). NGO programme managers were responsible for sharing this learning within their organisations, and many NGOs used it to inform their plans and proposals for a subsequent Fund.

Development of a model 'theory of change': Donor programme monitoring and sector monitoring benefits from clarity on how 'change' is conceived and communicated. The 'theory of change' shown in Figures 3 and 4 were developed to conceptualise the different ways that different NGOs within the Fund were attempting to 'create change', to highlight to those NGOs involved in direct service provision that their results were unlikely to be unsustainable. Figure 4 represents how most NGOs worked and was the dominant conceptualisation in the Fund.

The theory of change was purposefully simplified to assist in communication of *the most important* aspects of how change was understood (rather than to try and capture a comprehensive view of all possible linkages and possibilities). The monitoring was set up to explicitly test key assumptions in this theory of change. Namely, to test if the actions of the NGO 'delivery team' actually influenced the 'institutional and community partners' as intended, and to then test if the intended actions by "institutional and community partners' resulted in enduring WASH services for 'poor households and communities'. Key risks arise at both of these levels and many lessons were borne from analysing these assumptions within NGO work. For instance, one NGO focused attention on developing approaches to social inclusion in CLTS and influenced changes within their government partners to use such approaches (measured under Outcome 5). However, this did not lead to the desired ultimate outcome of inclusion of poor

households gaining access (measured under Outcome 1) because other agencies were providing toilets directly to some poor households and hence there was an unwillingness to follow CLTS processes and a lack of motivation to try and change their situation.

Our experience was that placing 'human actors' (NGO delivery team, institutional and community partners, etc.) as central in the conceptualisation of the theory of change (Crawford, 2004) assisted in ease of communication and comprehension of both the theory of change and the related monitoring system because all stakeholders instinctively understand the 'logic' of relationships of influence. This approach differs from 'functional' approaches to describing a 'theory of change' in which programme logic is articulated in terms of activities and processes that are abstracted from the humans involved.

Sector monitoring could usefully adopt this simplified human-actor centered approach to conceptualising change. This conception assists in identifying relevant indicators and evaluative questions by focusing on the experience of various classes of human along the chain of influence, revealing the assumptions implicit in the 'theory of change'.

Figure 3: Model 'theory of change' for agencies focused on direct implementation.
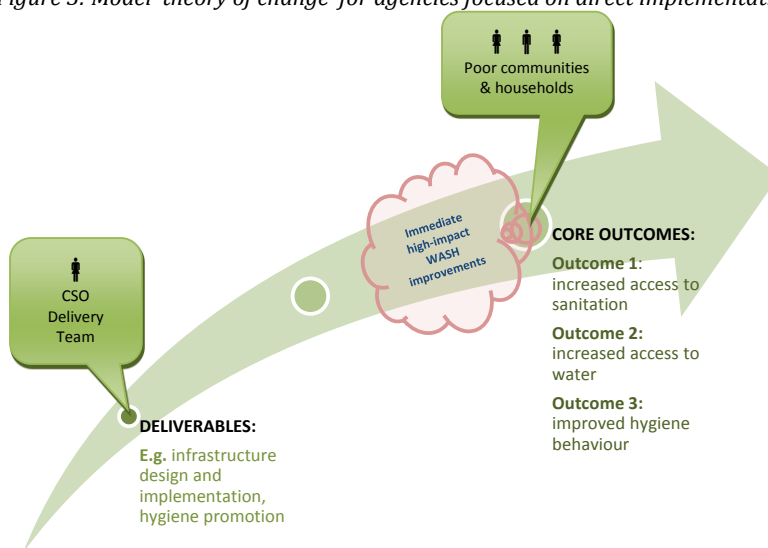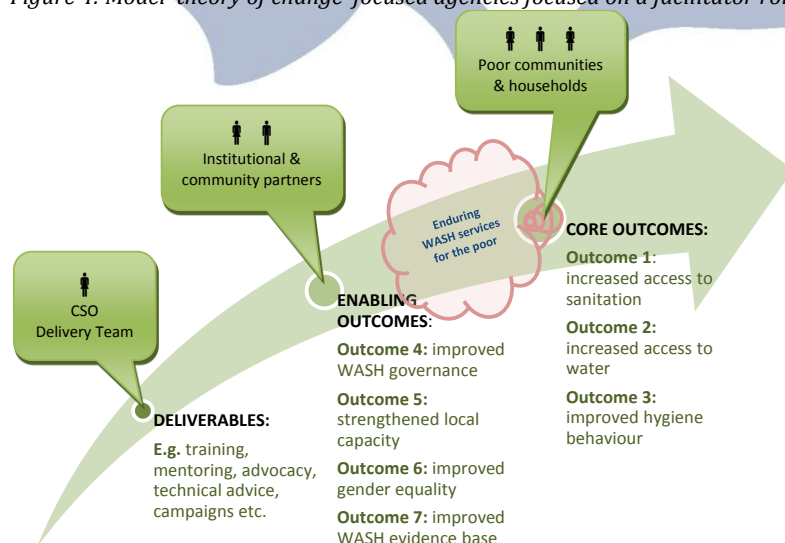
Figure 4: Model 'theory of change' focused agencies focused on a facilitator role.

Well-structured performance assessment framework (PAF): The structure of the performance framework, which defined 'what' monitoring information would be collected and reported by NGOs, is shown in Figure 5 and was based on the theory of change presented in Figure 4. The full PAF is shown as an Annex to the paper. One innovative aspect of this framework was the 19 'result areas' which permitted NGOs to report in thematic areas with their own 'content' combined with seven pre-defined indicators. Often WASH monitoring is entirely structured around key quantitative data against pre-defined indicators. However, this means that much valuable information about how and why approaches work or do not work is not systematically captured and opportunity for related learning is lost. Use of 'result areas' allowed richer qualitative (and quantitative, but not pre-defined) information to be collected and analysed. It was also important since the NGOs were working across 21 different countries, each with its own national approaches to monitoring, to which NGOs sought to align. We also had to balance a tension: a) having sufficient flexibility to allow the NGOs to capture and interpret context-specific information; with b) having sufficient structure to allow 'Fund-level' analysis and 'aggregation' of achievements and learning. Sector monitoring that seeks to include a learning focus will also need to strike such a balance between prescription and flexibility.

Figure 5: Fund performance assessment framework structure (see Annex for full PAF contents).

Other more specific lessons concerning particular parts of PAF that are relevant for informing sector monitoring relate to: how service level was addressed; inclusion of outcomes focused on 'service delivery'; inclusion of an outcome focused wholly on gender equality and; complications faced in using hygiene proxy indicators. These are described below:

- *Service level* was addressed using a performance question: 'what changes have occurred in user satisfaction with water/sanitation services?', since it was assessed that including multiple indicators of water quality, quantity, reliability, access time and sustainability would be too demanding to request of the NGOs. However, since this performance question was not mandatory, the majority of NGOs did not attempt to answer it in any depth. Some CSOs reported access times or distances and quantities and very few reported on water quality. The future Fund will seek to further this agenda by working with progressive NGOs to trial use of multiple indicators that take in the different dimensions of service level and share the lessons learnt from this endeavour.

- Two outcomes within the PAF focused specifically on *service delivery*, namely "improved WASH governance and effectiveness" and "strengthened capacity in partner governance". This was to ensure that not only 'access' data was collected but also information about how services were provided, improved and governed. Information reported against these outcomes was dominantly qualitative in nature and required detailed analysis to draw out and aggregate achievements and lessons. Sector monitoring needs to consider if and how such qualitative information should

be collected, or the potential use of qualitative information scales for outcome areas that do not lend themselves to specific quantitative indicators.

- An outcome focused wholly on *gender equality* was intentionally included as an 'enabling outcome' in the PAF, given the strong links between involvement of women in activities and decision-making to sustainability (Van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998; Van Wijk-Sijbesma and Mukherjee, 2000). The purpose here was to raise awareness and focus on gender as a critical element. The result was that almost all NGOs reported against this area, and although only 57% of expected changes were achieved for this area, the Fund demonstrated a significant improvement in relative focus on this area as compared with previous NGO work.

- Our use of proxy indicator on 'additional locations with handwashing facilities and soap' (to reflect 'use' of handwashing facilities) met with significant challenges, and points to the on-going difficulties in *monitoring hygiene behaviour change*. NGOs used widely varying methods and sample sizes which undermined data quality and integrity. In future, and if such indicators are used in sector monitoring, defining tightly specified methods to measure this indicator is critical.

Key messages and recommendations: Government staff responsible for sector monitoring should:

- Consider the learning needs of their sector and how to build learning opportunities for different groups as an integral part of the design of sector monitoring arrangements - this includes identifying key questions and how these can be answered, and ways to facilitate real-time data and feedback to sector stakeholders.

- Create 'models' of how change happens with a specific focus on different human actors (e.g. local government, WASH committees) as a useful way to identify what needs to be monitored and how.

- Consider how to find a good balance between prescription and flexibility within a monitoring system.

What were key success factors of the Fund monitoring arrangements?
We identified two main success factors that are transferable to the design of sector monitoring systems:

1. Criticality of a purpose-built information system.
2. 'People' focus with real-time engagement and feedback.

Each is discussed in turn below.

Purpose-built information system: The MRP used Microsoft Access (a desktop database application) for data storage and analysis. This database, which required investment of a number of weeks and relevant expertise (a small investment compared with the overall investment), was critical to all functions of the MRP. It represented a simple, inexpensive, yet effective system, and was chosen over an on-line system that would have required greater expense to develop and maintain. Important aspects included both the ability to analyse sets and sub-sets of qualitative and quantitative

data and also to format different presentation of different results for different audiences. The information system also efficiently assembled qualitative data-sets to allow manual analysis by the MRP. Since the MRP's focus was on information *use* and learning, it was essential to ensure appropriate data was provided to key stakeholders in a useable format. Information systems within the WASH sector are often undervalued and lacking appropriate investment, with greater emphasis placed on choosing indicators and definitions rather than how information will be captured, stored, analysed and communicated. Our learning highlights the value and need for such systems and the viability of using 'best practicable technology' such that governments are in a position to use and maintain such systems.

'People' focus and real-time feedback: Monitoring is often reduced to a technical focus on numbers and trends. However for monitoring information to be valued and used, the ways in which people receive, process and communicate data must be given significant thought and consideration. The information needs of various stakeholders must also be carefully understood. And as mentioned earlier, representing the 'theory of change' in terms of people, or 'human actors' assisted NGOs and others to easily engage with and understand the monitoring system. The MRP played a role in bringing monitoring information 'to life' through direct engagement with the NGOs and with AusAID staff. Such engagement took place through learning events organised for the Fund, a series of monitoring trips that covered 22 of the projects and through keeping up a relationship with the relevant NGO programme manager and AusAID staff. The monitoring trips were designed to provide real-time feedback and critique of both the NGO's monitoring and evaluation, and also the effectiveness of their work based on sector good practice. For example, advice was provided to an NGO in Vietnam on how to better coordinate demand-side and supply-side sanitation activities. For sector monitoring, building in explicit roles to facilitate information uptake and engagement with monitoring results is critical to extract the potential value of investment in such a system.

Key messages and recommendations: Government staff responsible for sector monitoring should:

- Ensure adequate investment in appropriate information systems. Such systems need to be capable of handling the required analysis but need not be overly complex or expensive
- Maintain a 'people' focus to sector monitoring, including how the monitoring system is conceived and how it is operationalised.

What types of support could NGOs provide to development of national monitoring systems

Although there are a wide range of roles that NGOs are well-placed to play to support sector monitoring, NGOs on the whole, do not yet see this as part of their role and are focused on their own monitoring needs.

A 'strategy map', initially developed by IDRC as a part of 'outcome mapping' (Earl et al., 2002), is a useful tool for categorising the different 'strategies' used by development partners, including NGOs, and can be used to conceptualise different NGO roles to support sector monitoring. According to this framework, strategies can be classified as causal, persuasive or supportive, and may be applied either with a focus on particular individuals or groups, or may be applied to the broader enabling environment for service provision.

During the Fund a similar strategy map was developed to categorise the diversity of approaches adopted by NGOs and allowed systematic interrogation and testing of their effectiveness (see Willetts et al., 2011). Here we use the strategy map to develop a typology of ways in which NGOs could feasibly support sectoring monitoring (see Figure 6). We then review the extent to which NGOs in the Fund adopted such strategies and point to gaps that could be given attention in the future.

Figure 6: Strategy map 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	Direct role in monitoring own direct implementation activities. *Potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring:* *Provide monitoring information to government concerning community, school or public water and sanitation systems (either built by NGO or other agency).*	Providing awareness raising, education or specific training to community members or other partners. *Potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring:* *Build interest and motivation for local-level monitoring and support relevant skills development through training.*	Providing frequent, sustained, on-going mentoring and support; or multipurpose capacity building; or developing support structures, committees and networks. *Potential NGO roles to support sector monitoring:* *Use systematic strategies to build the 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	Engaging in policy dialogue on specific issues, directly causing changes in incentives, rules or guidelines; playing an advocacy or social accountability role. *Characteristic activities in this Fund:* *Lead lobby or mobilise community members or other partners and organisations to advocate for unified sector monitoring*	Dissemination of information widely to a broad audience; creation of a persuasive environment for a specific behaviour or attitude; and conducting workshops and conferences. *Characteristic activities in this Fund:* *Document and share own learning and innovations with respect to WASH monitoring with broad set of other sector stakeholders and promote their uptake.*	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. *Characteristic activities in this Fund:* *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.*

The following sections describe examples from the Fund of how and where NGOs demonstrated such approaches. This analysis demonstrates significant space for increased adoption of many of the proposed strategies by NGOs, since very few of the NGOs had deliberate efforts to directly support sector monitoring.

I-1: Provide monitoring information to government concerning community, school or public water and sanitation systems (either built by NGO or other agency).

The majority of NGOs in the Fund were only supporting sector monitoring in this limited way, which is to collect monitoring information primarily for themselves, their donor and sharing this monitoring information with government partners. In some cases baseline studies conducted by NGOs were useful in providing insight into inaccuracies in government monitoring. For instance, one NGO in Bangladesh showed that government Department of Public Health Engineering data for sanitation coverage of 38-58% in three 'upazilas' in 2009 was actually at 5-28% when the NGO conducted their baseline study in 2010, with these large differences gaining attention from relevant government staff. Another NGO in Nepal established a community-level database on poverty ranking which was able to lead to more equitable distribution of public resources in support of sanitation.

I-2: Build interest and motivation for local-level monitoring and support relevant skills development through training.

The majority of NGOs in the Fund established committees of some kind to manage either water, sanitation and hygiene or all of these areas. Many NGOs also equipped these groups to monitor WASH status within their communities, which is a step towards communities and their leaders being in a position to offer such information to local government.

Also, a number of the CSOs identified weaknesses in their M&E systems (and opportunities to improve) in their completion reports (Willetts et al. 2012). One spin-off from the emphasis on high-quality monitoring in the Fund was an increase in skills and awareness within NGOs and their partner organisations, including in their analytical capacity. Over time this will place these NGOs in a better position to provide meaningful support to improving sector capacity for sector monitoring.

I-3: Use systematic strategies to build the monitoring skills and capacity of local government or service providers, private sector or schools.

There were examples in the Fund of NGOs supporting government capacity for monitoring. In these cases the NGOs were working closely with government in all aspects of their implementation, and their support included specialist inputs to analyse sector stakeholder information needs, institutional functions, capacity gaps and work with government to develop simple systems to capture, analyse and share monitoring data. For example, one NGO's approach in Vietnam, Nepal, Laos and Cambodia included supporting government to monitor sanitation outcomes. Another NGO working in Indonesia and Bangladesh also directly supported existing government monitoring systems for sanitation by working in a direct support role for local government (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: A government official explaining monitoring results achieved through both NGO and government support in Bangladesh

E-1: Lead lobby or mobilise community members or other partners and organisations to advocate for sector monitoring.
There was no evidence of NGOs taking up this strategy in the Fund.

E-2: Document and share own learning and innovations with respect to WASH monitoring with broad set of other sector stakeholders and promote their uptake.
A small number of NGOs explicitly sought to innovate and to share their innovations with government. For instance, one NGO working in Bhutan achieved adoption of elements of their project monitoring framework which used a qualitative information scale to move beyond counting numbers of toilets to monitoring sanitation behaviour by examining the hygienic status of toilets, and also included a scale for examining handwashing with soap. Their ideas were taken up and integrated into government monitoring systems, including Ministry of Health's Annual Survey in February/March each year, and inclusion of indicators to sanitary access and hygienic toilet usage in the next Five Year Development Plan from mid-2013 as Key sector Result Areas (Halcrow, pers comm. 2013).

Also in Nepal, the concept of this scale generated interest from the relevant Regional official, Regional Monitoring and Supervision Office under the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage and other sector stakeholders who recognised the need to find performance monitoring indicators that move beyond toilet coverage. Another example is the development and application of new ICT approaches that can be applied by government to streamline data collection and analysis. For example, an NGO working in Kenya used M-GESA, a tailor-made mobile phone application to capture household-level

sanitation data. Data generated from the system was used to provide feedback to government, CBOs and communities on sanitation status and progress towards project targets.

E-3: 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.

There was evidence of this strategy being employed by two NGOs working in Timor-Leste. NGOs contributed standardised information to a sector planning tool that was used by government and other stakeholders to monitor and predict levels of access and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. These same NGOs also participate in national working groups involved in developing national monitoring, providing advice and input.

Key messages and recommendations:

Government staff responsible for sector monitoring should:

- Consider and communicate the range of roles which NGOs or other sector stakeholders might play in support of initiatives that are led by national government.

Programme designers (both NGOs and donors) should:

- Make efforts to adopt one or more of the above strategies that can support sector monitoring, particularly considering strategies which are not yet in use, such as advocacy work, to generate demand for sector monitoring

M&E specialists:

- Should align monitoring and evaluation systems of WASH projects and programmes to the greatest extent possible to sector monitoring, instigate the sharing of information with government and examine strategies that will assist implementers to support sector monitoring efforts.

Conclusions

A structured reflection of a large-scale civil society Fund and its monitoring arrangements provided valuable insights into important elements to support quality sector monitoring that embeds learning and information 'use' rather than just data collection. Specifically, the paper highlighted the importance of building in explicit 'learning' focus through a developmental evaluation approach and real-time feedback, use of models to conceptualise the 'theory of change' and a well-structured performance assessment framework (PAF) that balances prescription with flexibility. Beyond this, a typology of strategies that could be adopted by NGOs to explicitly support sector monitoring in a systematic way was presented and explored using examples of NGO work from the Fund. This analysis demonstrated significant further potential for NGOs

to contribute to advancing an agenda and demand for sector monitoring as well as providing practical support.

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