



## Monitoring and evaluation at community level

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IT IS WIDELY recognised that the involvement of rural water and sanitation users in the planning, provision and maintenance of water and sanitation services is critical to sustainability. Given the role of communities in decision-making and management of these services, it seems logical that they are involved in the collection and analysis of the data upon which those decisions are based.

In an effort to improve the sustainability of water and sanitation projects the Mvula Trust embarked on an initiative, supported by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWA), to develop community-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

The overall aim of the programme is to strengthen the M&E capacity of the community water supply and sanitation sector as a whole. A key aspect of achieving this aim is the development of community-based M&E systems, tools and practices, which will facilitate M&E for sustainability at the lowest appropriate level.

The community-based approach represents an important departure from conventional approaches, where M&E is carried out almost entirely on behalf of donor or government agencies by external consultants. In contrast,

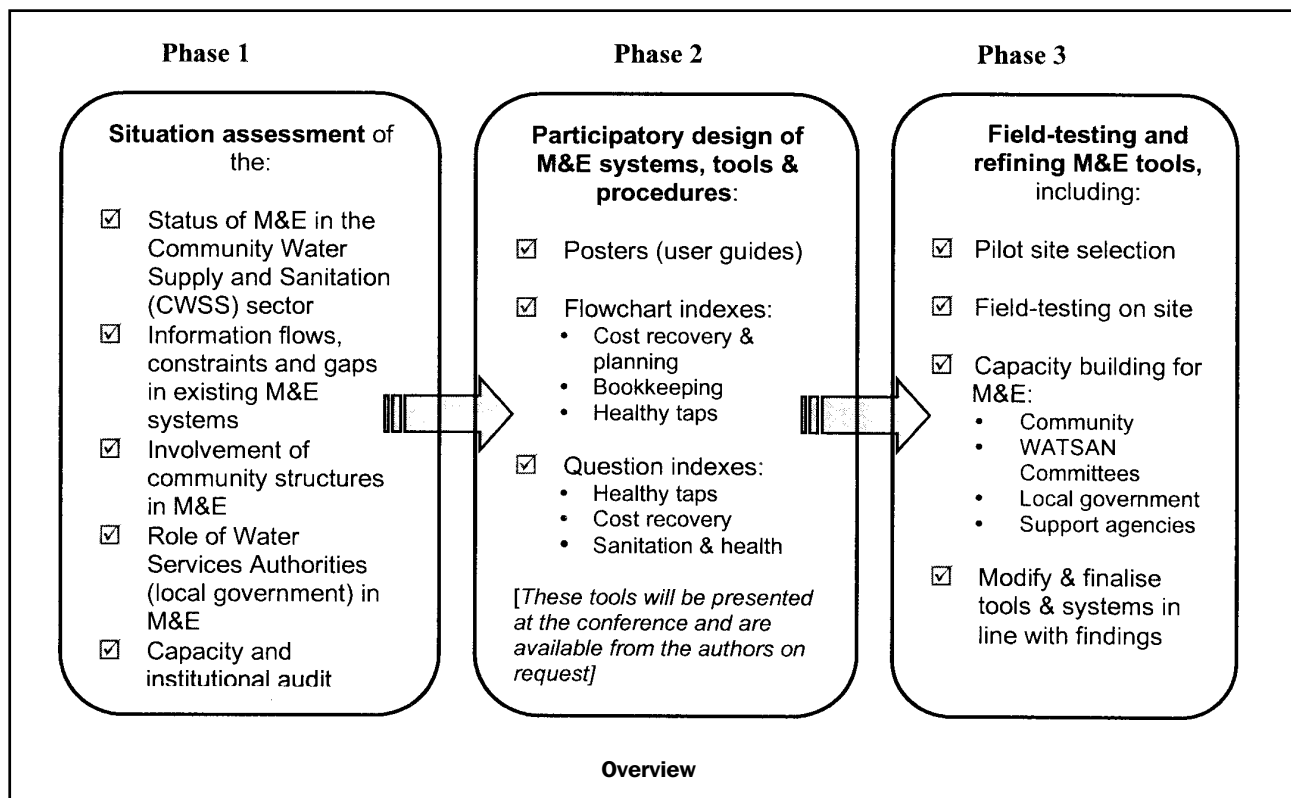
the tools, systems and procedures developed in this project<sup>1</sup> are designed to ensure that the community is an integral component of the M&E process; in collecting and analysing relevant data, and where necessary, initiating corrective action.

In this way, community structures are able to interact with external agents independently and from an informed position.

This paper will outline the phases, findings and lessons of the project, and will then focus on the methodology used to develop community-based M&E tools, systems and procedures, in order to allow for replicability. The flow-chart below shows the phases and main activities involved in each phase.

### Phase 1: Main findings and recommendations from the situation assessment

Based on the findings from interviews and focus groups with a broad range of stakeholders, conducted in the situation assessment, recommendations were made for



Main findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ The need for M&amp;E is widely acknowledged and recognised in the CWSS sector, but possibly as a result of the emphasis on infrastructure delivery, current systems are limited to financial, physical and time-bound indicators.</li> <li>☑ Many water services institutions lack the resources, capacity and commitment to develop effective M&amp;E systems.</li> <li>☑ There is a gap in the utilisation of M&amp;E data collected - most M&amp;E systems function only as one way reporting systems and the data collected is very rarely used to plan action to address problems.</li> <li>☑ While there is a clear acknowledgement of the importance of institutional and social development (ISD) issues for sustainability, there is very little focus on ISD in current M&amp;E systems.</li> <li>☑ There is some uncertainty about the way M&amp;E systems should be designed to flag problems at project level.</li> <li>☑ The focus in M&amp;E for sanitation is on the performance of Project Steering Committees and the quality of latrines built rather than on links between sanitation and health.</li> <li>☑ Lack of capacity within organisations inhibits effective M&amp;E.</li> <li>☑ The extent to which DWAF's M&amp;E programme (Version 4) is used and supported, differs widely across role-players and institutions.</li> <li>☑ Many existing M&amp;E systems duplicate information gathering and require a relatively high degree of technological sophistication.</li> <li>☑ Many current M&amp;E systems are complicated and attempt to monitor too many issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ There is a need to promote a better understanding of M&amp;E as a project management tool and as an integral part of the project cycle across role-players in the CWSS sector.</li> <li>☑ M&amp;E should be linked to sustainability, focussing on key sustainability issues and outcomes.</li> <li>☑ Different M&amp;E systems should complement rather than duplicate each other.</li> <li>☑ The aims and objectives of different M&amp;E systems need to be clarified.</li> <li>☑ M&amp;E will need to be driven and designed in keeping with Water Services Authorities' (District and Regional Councils) information needs.</li> <li>☑ There needs to be greater clarity on roles and responsibilities in order to design effective M&amp;E systems.</li> <li>☑ M&amp;E systems and procedures should be technically simplified and made user-friendly.</li> <li>☑ M&amp;E systems should specify/ allow for corrective action to address problems.</li> <li>☑ An approach should be formulated to shifting M&amp;E paradigms and building awareness of the value and efficacy of M&amp;E through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a culture of M&amp;E</li> <li>• Developing CWSS sector capacity in the design and implementation of M&amp;E</li> <li>• Integrating M&amp;E throughout the project cycle</li> <li>• Involving communities in M&amp;E</li> <li>• Clarifying information needed at various levels</li> <li>• Decentralising M&amp;E to local level</li> <li>• Developing appropriate tools for water services institutions at different levels</li> <li>• Increased sectoral M&amp;E support from DWA F</li> <li>• Developing measurable KPI's</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

both M&E in the CWSS sector broadly, and for the development of community-based M&E tools and procedures in Phase 2.

### Phase 2: Field workshops to develop community-based M&E tools and procedures

Participatory field workshops were facilitated in 8 pilot sites with various community groupings and management structures such as women's groups and village water and sanitation committees (WATSAN's). The aim of these workshops was to facilitate the identification of key M&E issues; defining indicators; strategies for collecting and analysing data; and strategies for reporting and using M&E data from the community's perspective.

Combinations of methods were used to facilitate the workshops and to collect additional information from relevant role-players. These included participatory methods, focus groups, on-site observations, village walkabouts and interviews.

The field workshops with WATSAN committees began with small group discussions on their expectations of water services. This was based on the belief that people monitor in order to ensure that they get what *they* want. A variation of 3-pile sorting<sup>2</sup> was used to stimulate creative thinking and discussion. Participants were given a set of 20 or more pictures representing different activities relating to rural water and sanitation provision. These included pictures pertaining to operation and maintenance, financial management, communication, health, and so on. All the

pictures were contextually specific. After agreeing what each picture depicted, participants sorted them into three piles in keeping with whether they felt the picture depicted something "good", "bad" or "not relevant to us". The participants then grouped the "good" and "bad" piles into categories or issues of concern for them as community-based management structures. This process enabled participants to identify sustainability issues they wanted to monitor. Interestingly, typical issues identified by community groups were consistent with key sustainability issues identified through Mvula's "Strengthening Sustainability Initiative<sup>3</sup>" and included maintenance, water usage, health, involvement of women and financial management or cost recovery.

In the next step, participants explored how they would know the "good" is happening and that the "bad" is not happening. Here participants were grappling with issues such as: What are the best indicators to determine whether the project meets their needs and expectations? How will the information be collected? By whom? How often? If a problem is detected, what corrective action should be taken? While some of the indicators developed were applicable to a broad range of projects, most were village-specific. This information was then captured in tables and used as the basis for the development of draft guidelines that resulted in the community-based tools and procedures for data collection, analysis and use to be field tested in additional projects in Phase 3. In keeping with the lessons from Phase 1, the criteria used for developing the flowcharts and checklists included simplicity; usefulness and ease of use; focus on key sustainability issues and external linkages.

### Phase 3: Field-testing and refining the tools

The field-testing of the flowcharts and checklists is underway in 8 pilot sites at present. Preliminary findings are as follows: Information from community based M&E is empowering WATSAN committees to fulfill their functions post-completion of projects; it works best where the WATSAN committee is strong and cohesive and has the necessary infrastructural base; community M&E is most effective where reporting lines and roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated - this relates to both agents and the community.

### References

The Mvula Trust: Revised Integrated Report on Situation Assessment (Phase 1), May 1999.  
The Mvula Trust: Field Workshops Report, November 1999.  
The Mvula Trust: Field-based M&E Systems Procedure Manual, Version 1.0 (Work in progress), 1999.  
*[All of the above were developed for Field-based M&E Systems in Support of DWAF's M&E Programme]*

<sup>1</sup> The project is known as "Field-based M&E Systems in Support of the M&E Programme of DWAF"

<sup>2</sup> A Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) tool

<sup>3</sup> See AusAID Strengthening Sustainability Initiative, The Mvula Trust, 1998.

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