



Planning and monitoring for sustainability and equity

N Mukherjee, Indonesia

BEFORE THE 1990s global development goals for water supply and sanitation were defined overwhelmingly in terms of quantitative coverage targets. Over the last decade newer concerns have emerged in the sector, adding qualifiers to these targets. The Millennium Development Goals call for not just an increase in population access to safe water and sanitation but also an increase in sustainable access for half the world's unserved population between 2000 and 2015 and significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

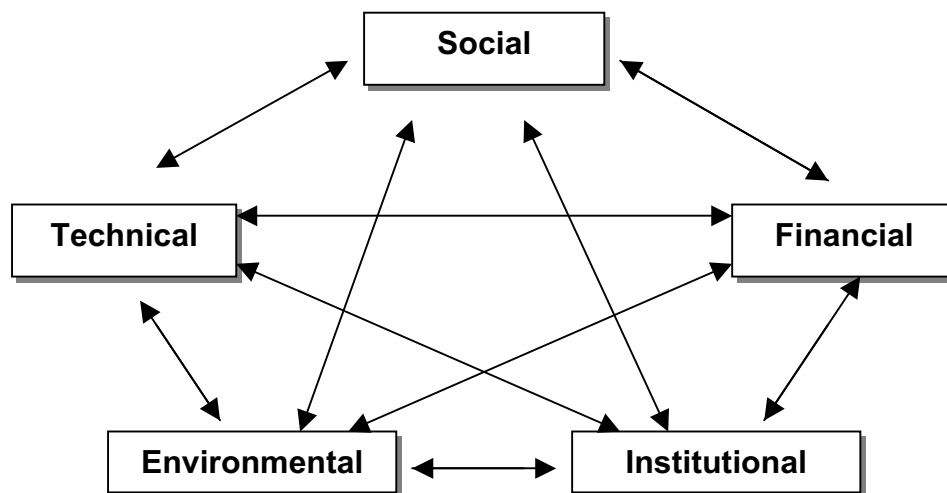
Sustainability of services and equity of access to them are thus the new ideals, although interpretation of the terms still varies greatly among sector professionals and agencies.

An important first lesson WSP has learned is that progress towards the new kinds of goals begins with developing common understanding and consensus among partners and clients about what constitutes SUSTAINABILITY and EQUITY in water supply and sanitation and the strategies to achieve them, i.e. demand-responsive approaches (DRA), informed choice by consumers, inclusion of and participation by all stakeholders in decision-making.

To chart a course towards the seemingly abstract *sustainability* and *equity* objectives and to monitor progress towards them, they must be made measurable and concrete in sector policies, strategies, programs and projects. Since 1998 WSP has been working with country level clients and partners, to develop commonly accepted definitions and indicators for *sustainability* and *equity* and then institutionalize them through national sector policies, strategies, sector agencies and large scale water supply and sanitation projects.

Understanding sustainability and equity holistically in water supply and sanitation

In the past, *sustainability* in water supply and sanitation has been understood and pursued in a variety of ways depending on who was interested in assessing it. Engineers interpreted sustainability mainly as a technical issue. Economists defined it in terms of financial viability. Environmentalists approached it from natural resources management perspectives. Social scientists related it to community organization and participation. All were correct, but neither



SUSTAINABILITY =

Continuous, satisfactory functioning and effective use of WSS services.
(Effective use = Use by the majority in a health-promoting and environmentally sound manner).

EQUITY =

Everyone (e.g. men & women, rich & poor, social minorities & majority groups) has equal voice and choice in decision-making, equal access to information/opportunities/benefits from projects, and shares resulting benefits and responsibilities fairly.

Figure 1. Key aspects of sustainability of WSS services

Table 1. MPA indicators and subindicators used to assess water supply services

A.	Indicators for Sustained Services	Sub-indicators to measure and aggregate
A 1	<i>System Quality</i> (Technical/Environmental/Social Components)	Extent to which construction matches design; Quality of design, materials + workmanship (according to men/women users, rich/poor users and technical assessor); Quality of source management.
A 2	<i>Effective Functioning</i> (Technical/Social/Environmental Components)	Effectiveness of operation in terms of water quantity, quality, reliability and predictability (according to men/women users, rich/poor users)
A 3	<i>Effective Financing</i> (Finance/Social/Institutional components)	Coverage of investment and/or recurrent costs; Universality and timelines of payments by users.
A 4	<i>Effective Management</i> (Institutional/Social/Financial components)	Level and timeliness of repairs. (according to men/women users, rich/poor users); Quality of budgeting and account keeping

view was complete. Since none of the specialists offered a clear blueprint for success, sustainability remained an elusive ideal and was used only as a post-project evaluation indicator, where it was more identifiable by its absence rather than its manifestation, when systems ceased to function.

Drawing upon experiences amassed by sector practitioners over the past decades, in the late 1990s WSP began to promote discussions about a conceptual model for sustainability along the lines of a multi-dimensional equilibrium with 5 inter-dependent components (Figure 1). The concept lent itself to practical illustrations at project agency and community levels and has now gained wide acceptance.

Compared to sustainability, *equity* was less understood and recognized as an issue until very recently. Global development history has seen periodic global thrusts towards reaching the unreached and serving the poor. Experiences with poverty-targeted exercises revealed that basic infrastructure services need both the poor and the non-poor as clients, to be financially and socially viable. Sustainable services, therefore, are not just those that function in the technical sense, but those that serve various sections and levels of society, to their continued satisfaction. Projects thus need to strive for equitable services in order that they

are sustainable. “Equitable” does not necessarily mean equal, but fair, according to all categories of stakeholders.

A consensus has now grown around the following inter-linked definitions of Sustainability and Equity, which serve as the foundations for WSP’s work with country partners, at policy-making, sector institutions and community levels.

Measuring sustainability and equity in project outcomes at ground level

Through a collaboration with the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, WSP has developed a set of indicators and a participatory methodology for measuring sustainability with equity, which is currently being applied in Asia, Africa and Latin America for water and sanitation project planning, monitoring and evaluation. A bird’s eye view of the MPA¹ is provided here.

The MPA approach to measuring sustainability and equity holistically with stakeholders at all levels is built on the following 4 principles (a-d).

- a. *Multi-dimensional indicators for sustainability of services, with measures of equity built in, should be used to measure project performance.*

Table 2. A scale from the MPA fieldbook

Measuring equity in management of services	Score	Converted to 100 point scale	Score given
No special water management organization; service establishment is dealt with by agency and general local leaders	0	0	
All male water and sanitation committee representing middle and upper class users	1	25	
All male water and sanitation committee representing low, middle and upper class users	2*	50*	
Special water and sanitation management committee with up to 50% women and representing middle and upper class users	3	75	
Special water and sanitation management committee with up to 50% women and representing low, middle and upper class user households	4	100	

6 The score 2 (or 50) always represents the mid point of the scale, the minimum required for Sustainability.



Figure 1. MPA in Lao PDR

Although equity in community water supply and sanitation may include many dimensions, in its most fundamental sense it is taken to mean equal voice and choice for both women and men, both poor and the rich/non-poor in the community. MPA sustainability indicators have gender and social class equity built into their measurement. The box below illustrates how one set of MPA indicators (and their respective sub-indicators used to assess water supply services) include the interlinked components of sustainability.

- b. Indicators and assessment tools should be uniformly benchmarked to indicate minimum levels achievable for sustainability. A scale from the MPA Fieldbook illustrates this point below.
- c. Assessment tools and procedures should be empowering, i.e. they should enable self-assessment of the situation by each level of stakeholders, and prompt action by them in response, to enhance sustainability.

MPA assessments use group-based open-ended, visual methods to make local situations transparent, leading to analysis of causes and effects and self-scoring of previously benchmarked scales by participating groups, through discussion and consensus. The end result is identification of actions needed to raise scores, if they fall below the minimum required for sustainability (mid points of scales).

The methodology should enable quantitative aggregation of results for project management purposes. The example below illustrates the aggregation of 4 components of sustainability for 40 Indonesian communities following an MPA assessment.

Working with sector agencies and client communities towards sustainability and equity

The approach now being promoted by WSP through sector projects consists of:

- Assessing sustainability and equity of existing services with communities.
- Planning for improvements (aiming at higher than minimum benchmark scores in all components of sustainability, i.e. A1 – A4)
- Using a gender and poverty-sensitive, empowering project process to implement plans (designed using process indicators C, D, E from the MPA framework: Figure 3)
- Monitoring progress towards and beyond the minimum benchmark in components A1– A4.
- Aggregating community level assessments as the basis for institution level assessment of institutional factors helping or hindering sustainability and equity (the F indicators, Figure 3)

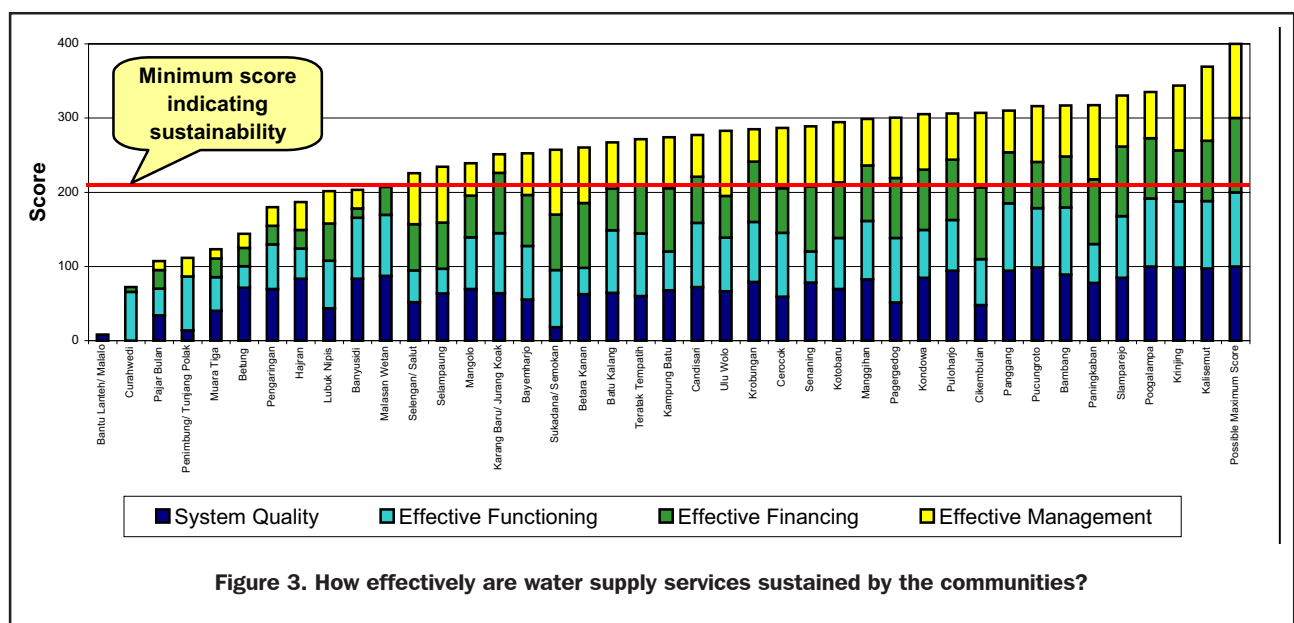


Figure 3. How effectively are water supply services sustained by the communities?

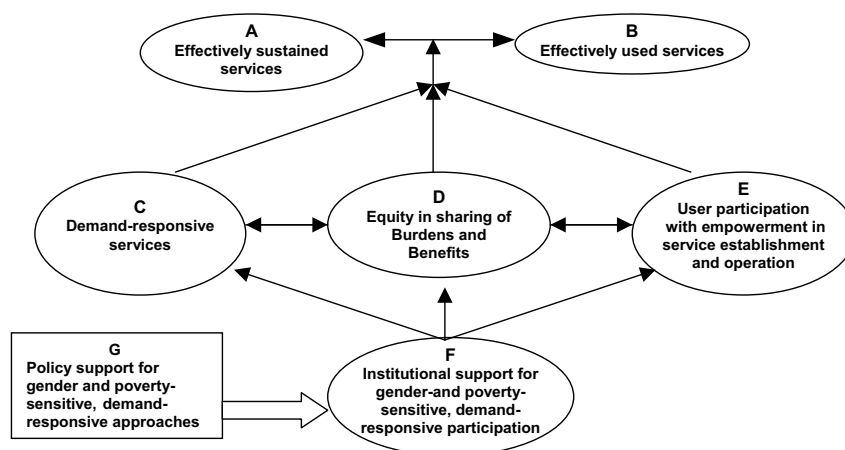


Figure 3. The MPA analytical framework

- Aggregating project and institution level results to provide the basis for policy level assessments of policy factors helping or hindering sustainability and equity (the G indicators in the Framework).

N MUKHERJEE, Senior Community Development Specialist, Water and Sanitation Programme - East Asia and Pacific (WSP-EAP), The World Bank.

Notes

- ¹ Senior Community Development Specialist, Water and Sanitation Program – East Asia and Pacific (WSP-EAP), The World Bank.
- ² Methodology for Participatory Assessments with Communities, Institutions and Policy Makers, by R. Dayal, Christine van wijk and Nilanjana Mukherjee. Water and Sanitation Program and IRC, 2000.