

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

**Sector coordination for better watsan coverage  
in Zambia's rural areas**

*Barbara Kazimbaya-Senkwe and Rees Mwasambili, Zambia*

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*In order to achieve greater efficiencies in the use of Government and donor finances in the RWSS sub-sector, the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) has been working towards improving coordination of stakeholders in the sector, with progress made in the RWSS sub-sector. It is argued that coordination will lead to improved WATSAN coverage. This paper explores the key arguments for coordination, the challenges faced, the strategy adopted and progress made, the challenges faced as well as the lessons learnt.*

*Key Words: Rural Water Supply and Sanitation, Coordination, SWAp, Zambia*

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## **Introduction**

The rural water supply and sanitation sector in Zambia, like that in many other African countries, receives a fair level of financial resources from donors and to a limited extent from the GRZ. Studies undertaken so far suggest that the sector receives around US\$13m annually, although more work needs to be done to ascertain the exact position. Despite these funds going to the sector, only 37% of the 7.6 million people living in Zambia's rural areas are said to have access to safe water supply, while a paltry 13% have access to adequate sanitation. Taking the borehole as the preferred water source for rural areas, the government estimates that just over US\$95m is required to meet the MDG targets for water supply. At the same time, it is estimated that Zambia needs over US\$35m for sanitation infrastructure. Although these estimates appear to be within reach, the challenge is for the water sector to quickly and adequately transcend its current problems if it is to compete for funds within the broader context of the Zambian social sector. Top on the list of these challenges is weak intra-sector coordination. It is argued that one of the main reasons for the apparent poor performance of the sub-sector is that there is ineffectiveness of financial resources due to a lack of a coordinated approach. Different financiers, particularly donors use different methods and routes for channeling funds to the sector, mainly through the project approach. This normally results in an inability to trace clearly where these funds are going, and also difficulty to monitor the results. Furthermore, there is duplication of effort and a resultant oversupply of WATSAN facilities in some areas, and complete neglect of other areas.

In an effort to redress this, the GRZ through the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MLGH) has since 2003 been engaged in a process aimed at better coordination of the sub-sector, with the intention of promoting efficiency of resource utilization and consequent improved access to

WATSAN. The MLGH under instruction of the Ministry of Finance, anticipates that this coordination will lead ultimately to the establishment of a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) to planning and management of the sector. Coordination however, entails reform of both institutions as well as procedures. As with all reform, this is a complex and difficult process. This paper shares some of the experiences from Zambia highlighting the progress made, the challenges faced as well as drawing out key lessons learnt.

## **Why Sector Coordination?**

Despite undergoing comprehensive institutional and legislative reforms, the water sector in Zambia remains fragmented and poorly coordinated. This has affected sector performance and has translated in low sector investments and efficiencies in utilization of government and donor funds, leading to a generally poor service delivery to the population.

The major stakeholders in RWSS in Zambia include government ministries, local authorities, external development partners, NGOs, communities and the private sector. The sub-sector is characterized by uncoordinated design and location of projects and programmes; many and uncoordinated funding routes; many players at the district level without clear roles and responsibilities and difficulties on the part of the responsible Ministry to take a lead in the sector. This has resulted in duplication of efforts and a poor distribution of coverage. In addition, it is very difficult for the Ministry of Finance and National Planning (MoFNP) to monitor resource flows. The Ministry of Local Government and Housing, responsible for water supply and sanitation, in collaboration with development partners, has since 2002 been engaged in efforts to address the above problems. The efforts have been directed at the national level (source of policy and funds) and the local government (district) level (service delivery level).

## Sector Coordination Progress

### Revised institutional framework for RWSS

The GRZ through MLGH launched in November 2004 a “Revised institutional framework for RWSS” to strengthen district leadership and coordination at local level. At the core of the revised institutional framework is devolution of authority and matching resources to the local authorities. Implementation of this framework is expected to strengthen the RWSS functions of the local authorities, enshrining them as the key institution at the district level and enabling them to coordinate all RWSS activities.

### Review of the WSS Policy

*The GRZ strategy for RWSS is encapsulated in the national water policy of 1994 and revolves around, community participation, development of a well defined investment programme, appropriate technology, emergency preparedness, cost recovery for operation and maintenance, capacity building and gender mainstreaming. These principles are also encapsulated in a number of strategies developed between 1995 and 2000. As part of better sector coordination, the GRZ is currently, in the process of consolidating these strategies into one coherent national policy for WSS, which will also provide policy guidance to the set-up of the Sector Wide approach framework.*

### Development of the National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program (NRWSSP)

The GRZ is currently preparing the NRWSSP in order to bring all RWSS activities under the control of GRZ. The NRWSSP consists of a coherent set of investment, institutional and sector support activities, with clear priorities and common approaches that are intended to speed up the achievement of the MDGs. It also proposes the establishment of a RWSS fund, capacity building for RWSS units at the district level; and strengthening of the RWSSU at national level. In terms of coordination, the NRWSSP is intended to re-align all donor funded projects and expects donors to follow government priorities for developing the sub-sector. It is anticipated that the GRZ and donors will sign an MOU stipulating the roles and responsibilities of the two partners and adopting the NRWSSP as the strategy for developing the sub-sector.

### Donor / GRZ coordination mechanism being developed

The MLGH receives a lot of technical assistance both in the form of short term consultants, as well as more long term technical assistants, mostly from outside Zambia, and funded by various donors for specific projects. This TA is normally provided on the argument that the MLGH is currently understaffed to manage all the donor projects. To streamline this TA and also to strengthen the functions of the MLGH, the MLGH has engaged the services of a Management Advisor (MA) whose terms of reference include, providing guidance on how the DISS and RWSSU can be strengthened, as well

as to coordinate all TAs provided by different donors. The MA is also expected to suggest to the GRZ, a mechanism for GRZ/ donor coordination in the sector.

### Informal Donor Meetings

On the donor side, the key donors in the sector hold informal donor meetings bi-monthly and normally appoint a team of donors to represent them with the government. It is anticipated that these donor meetings will eventually be formalized as part of the Harmonization in Practice (HIP) process, to which all donors in Zambia are signatories. The MA is also expected to address the donor meetings every month to update them on progress in the sector.

### IMS being developed and concepts being defined

One of the major areas of concern amongst stakeholders is the lack of agreement on what existing coverage levels are. This is because there is no single specific body charged with collecting data on the sector, resulting in different actors using different definitions and therefore different estimates. To address this, the MLGH is currently developing an IMS in two provinces, which includes an inventory of all water and sanitation facilities. The MLGH plans to roll out the IMS to all provinces as part of the NRWSSP. The IMS will provide clear indicators for use by the Central Statistical Office in their national statistics. This will make both planning and monitoring easier.

### Study of other SWAps

Zambia already has a number of SWAps including one in Health, in Education and in Public expenditure management. The MLGH is drawing lessons from these SWAps and also from other countries, in particular Uganda. These lessons will feed into the SWAp, initially for RWSS and later for the whole sector.

### Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP)

The GRZ is preparing the FNDP which will be the key government strategic plan for the period 2006-2011. The NRWSSP is part of the FNDP making it the mandatory document guiding development in the sub-sector and binding all stakeholders to its major principles and priorities.

## Challenges

Although much progress has been made, getting better sector coordination still faces a number of challenges:

**Fear to lose power:** Coordination and a programmatic approach mean that some interests lose some of their power and influence. For instance, the presence of a government program means that donors may not be able to design their own projects but must be ready to support a government program. However projects approach assures political capital for those involved. Therefore some stakeholders may not therefore be in favour of this apparent loss of power. The

shift from projects to programs is also an ideological shift and all stakeholders may not necessarily accept this.

***Skepticism towards Government leadership:*** Because of perceived and real capacity weaknesses in government, some donors may not be ready to accept that the government would be capable of leading a programmatic approach. They may therefore see the government and a coordinated approach as a hindrance to development.

***Home rules of donors may not be conducive to a programmatic approach:*** As donors must report to their own constituencies rather than to government, their willingness and ability to participate in a programmatic arrangement may be limited by their own procedures and institutional arrangements. For instance it may not be easy for some donors to pool resources into a government fund; others may not be willing to use government procedures for procurement, reporting etc.

***Donor infighting over leadership role:*** Coordination requires that one donor take the lead in both organizing the donors and also liaising with the government. Deciding on who takes this leadership may not always be easy as different donors may have different needs. For instance some may want or have the need to be 'seen as leaders' whilst some donors may not want to be led by others, particularly those seen as 'small' donors in terms of the amount of funds they bring to the sector.

***Technical capacity to move towards the SWAp:*** Coordination of the sector requires that government provides certain technical pieces including national programs, strategic investment plans etc. It may not always be easy or possible to get the right type of technical support to prepare these.

***Long or short term goals conflict:*** Due to the critical need for WATSAN services, and the lack of own resources by government, coordination and a programmatic approach may be difficult to achieve as government may try to maximise the resources available at a particular time for projects which are seen to bring immediate relief. Related to this is the fact that donors may continue with project preparations as they need to fulfill their obligations to their own countries or risk

losing funds allocated to them for the particular countries they are supporting. Linked to this is the problem related to the fact that staff from government are overstretched as they are on one hand expected to prepare for and move towards a coordinated approach, whilst at the same time that are expected to facilitate donor projects.

## Conclusion

From the progress made and the challenges being encountered, it is possible to draw the following conclusions and lessons for the sector:

***Sector coordination is a process:*** Due to the importance of water, institutional histories and procedures, sector coordination and a programmatic approach is a gradual, time consuming process that can be quite slow and frustrating. To get it right therefore, donors and government need to have patience, willingness to share experiences openly and persistence.

***Sector coordination is a negotiation:*** between government and donors and other players. All players must be prepared to compromise and learn from one another.

***Getting Political support from all stakeholders is key:*** Like most major reforms, getting coordination requires the buy in of all stakeholders. The process is therefore not just technical but also a political one and needs 'champions' from both the government and donor side.

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## Contact address

Barbara Kazimbaya-Senkwe  
Senior Sanitation Specialist  
WSP Zambia  
Email: bkazimbayasenkwe@worldbank.org

Rees Mwasambili  
Head,  
Rural Water and Sanitation Unit  
Ministry of Local Government and Housing

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