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THE FUTURE OF WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:
INNOVATION, ADAPTATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD

**Fifty years of monitoring and evaluation - from before
Drawers of Water to beyond the MDGs**

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BRIEFING PAPER 1230

Whether we benchmark, assess or monitor against a set of indices, indicators or selection criteria and whether we use a framework, matrix or personal judgement, everyday life is enveloped by the compelling need for measurement and accountability. This paper provides a synopsis of the evolution of the monitoring landscape existing within the WASH sector. The aim of the paper is to reflect and provoke discussion and debate on the complex, dispersed and multi-system environment that has been created over the years. It does not however, quantify the level and changing use of each of the approaches, applications or selection criteria available around the world today. Neither does it quantify or qualify the impact. However, concluding questions of whether the “pendulum has swung too far” and “is there a need for simplification and some level of standardisation” remain paramount.

Introduction

Since before the ground-breaking Drawers of Water in 1972 through to the UN GLAAS Report of 2010 society has been monitoring and evaluating access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in lower-income countries. The intention has been to save lives and to achieve economic growth. Throughout this period, the objectives have largely remained unchanged and remain mutually entwined within the concept of poverty reduction. In contrast, there have been significant, if apparently random, changes in associated terminology, methodology and approaches to planning and monitoring as well as an ever increasing number of related indices and indicators, standards and benchmarks. The complexity and potential for confusion and inefficiencies has been further exacerbated by the differences in interpretation and perception of what it all means against a background of a country’s ability to resource and/or wish to prioritise investment within the sector.

This briefing paper examines the development of monitoring within the WASH sector by documenting a timeline of associated key milestones. The changing monitoring and evaluation methods, varying tools and indicators as well as the methods of reporting progress are also examined. What this paper does not do is to go into a detailed comparative analysis of stakeholder approaches, terminology or analysis mechanisms, to monitor service provision. Neither does it consider the impact of monitoring on policy development and decision making – two possible areas for further investigation.

Given the objective of this paper is to provoke thought and raise questions, it is also very likely that there are other missing elements that should be considered in conjunction with what is examined here - again all possible areas for further research.

A journey of 50 years

Whether perceived as having been initiated by Truman in 1949 through his inaugural speech (Easterly, 2010) or, as observed by Cooper (2005), a consequence of Roosevelt’s stated desire in 1941 to extend “freedom from want” throughout the world, “development as a global policy objective dates from the 1940s”. Combined with the Charter of the United Nations (UN), to “promote social progress and better standards of life” (General Assembly, 1961), the 1950s became the era of growing support to the developing world, or lower-income countries, as often referred as today. In addition to preliminary efforts

by WHO during the 50s and 60s as well as the UN's First Development Decade (1960), with the key concept of "improved quality of life", the 1970s was the decade in which momentum was gained and visibility increased in the need to address the global water crisis. Unlike the previous decade, the resolution for the UN's Second Development Decade specifically referred to health, sanitation and water as objectives and, as detailed by Argarwal et al, (1981), the target as endorsed by the WHO was for "safe water by 1980". The 1970s were also host to two sector development studies commissioned by WHO, the UN-Habitat Conference in Vancouver in 1976 and UN Water Conference held at Mar del Plata in 1977, both events adopting the target of "clean water for all by 1990".

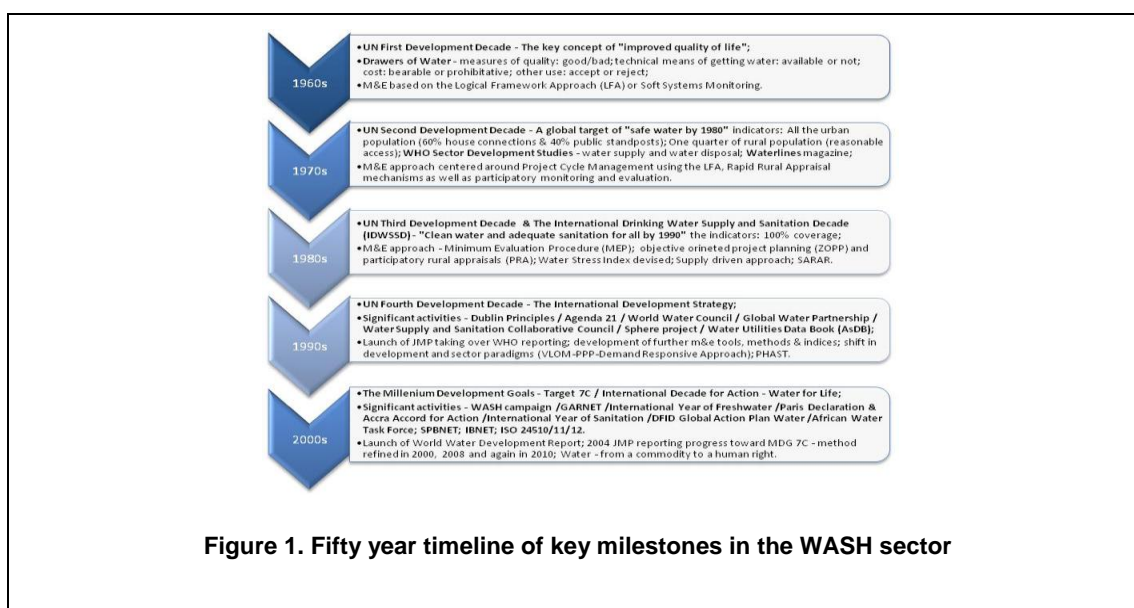
In November 1980, and probably one of the most significant sector efforts of the last fifty years, was the proclamation that 1981-1990 was to be the "International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade" (IDWSSD). The period of 1981-1990 was also the UN's Third Development Decade (3DD), which required governments to focus on eradication of poverty and dependency. Health, sanitation and water were also detailed as part of the 3DD; with primary health care considered as the conduit to attaining, by the year 2000, a level of health allowing the world's population to lead a productive life. More specifically, safe water and adequate sanitary facilities were also to be made available to all in rural and urban areas by 1990, thus providing synergies and reinforcing the objectives of the IDWSSD. As reported by Jolly (2003), the IDWSSD, whilst not achieving the overall goal, was the decade in which more people got access than in the 1970s or 1990s – the latter being host to (amongst other events and targets), the New Delhi Statement, the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable development and the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC).

Written into most of these agreements, targets and partnerships is the need for countries at National level to set their own targets and ensure robust review mechanisms were in place to deliver constant measurement of progress towards the attainment of the goals. In the case of the various Decade objectives, the UN was mandated to carry out reviews at a global, sectoral and regional level, with respective governments responsible at national level. These reviews and appraisals of implementation were to be consistent and, in order to avoid duplication, existing mechanisms were to be maintained. But with targets being set at national level, combined with an evolving landscape of approaches to and tools for monitoring and evaluation, questions were raised over how accurate and consistent was the data that was being recorded. As a consequence of needing to improve the robustness of household statistical data to design, implement and evaluate social and economic policy, the 1980s saw the creation of the Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS). Twenty years on, this approach is considered "one instrument that Governments can, and do use better to understand the causes of observed outcomes as well as the impact of their policies" (Scott et al, 2005).

The 1990s was also a decade with an infusion of other conferences, events and resultant think-tanks, networks and partnership developments. Perhaps as a subtle recognition, for the need to streamline, WHO focused activities on Information management and advocacy and it was UNICEF and WHO which aligned and set up the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP), for Water Supply and Sanitation.

As with the previous decade, the 2000s has been a period with significant WASH affiliated activity. Although masked by the MDGs, the last ten years have included Vision 21 "Water for People" in 2000, the International Year of Freshwater, 2003; the International Year of Sanitation, 2008; the Paris Declaration, 2005 and the Accra Agenda for Action, 2008. The latter two promoted the need for donor harmonisation and alignment, including, that of monitoring and evaluation (particularly indicators 9, 10 and 11). Despite this recognition the decade of the new millennium continued to launch new programmes such as: the first World Water Development Report in 2003, a task force on indicators, monitoring and reporting, the Programme for Action for Less Developed Countries, Decade (2001-2010) and the International Decade for Action: Water for Life (2005–2015). It would not be unreasonable to think that this incredible level of activity and potential duplication of effort was what led Hilary Benn, the then Secretary of State for International Development, in 2006 to call for one Annual Report to monitor progress; one high-level global annual meeting to decide on action and for each country to have one national water and sanitation plan; one water and sanitation coordination group and one lead UN body for water and sanitation at national level, as part of DFID's Global Action Plan (DFID, 2006). Although one could argue this too would add to the information overload.

As a backdrop to these timelines depicting changes in global goals, targets, there has also been changing paradigms in development and sector theories as well as methodologies and approaches to monitoring and evaluation (see Figure 1 below for examples). One should not forget there is also multi-linguistic; multi-cultural and multi-stakeholder environment bringing its own set of challenges.



From targets to monitoring and evaluation

Within what has become a somewhat hazy environment less clarity and consistency exists with respect to who, what, when, why and how all the targets are measured and reported. What are the implications? Is it a duplication of effort and replication of data or is it purely a consequence of the need for accountability? To contextualise the complex nature of monitoring and reporting, one needs to understand the hierarchy of monitoring and evaluation. As reported by Cotton and Bartram (2008), and evidenced through personal experience, the subset of agendas, purposes and requirements can be significant with monitoring being undertaken by up to 8 sets of direct stakeholders, from the beneficiary community to the international donor. In addition, indirect stakeholders such as district and national level beneficiary government representatives, responsible for cross-cutting aspects of the project, also spend time, money and effort in monitoring and in doing so often draw on resources from the direct stakeholders.

In turn one could argue that, given the above, the baselines from which to monitor progress in order to undertake comparative analysis (whether at country, regional or global level), will inevitably lack consistency. There are too many fragmented, un-related data sources to come to any clear-cut conclusions. Should we be asking ourselves to what level and frequency do we need to analyse, benchmark, set precedents, or create competition? Ultimately, should we be worried about the level of diversity and disparity that exists? Is the international development arena imposing a disproportionate level of monitoring and evaluation on a set of countries in the name of transparency, which those Member States do not impose upon themselves?

That said, there is evidence of concern at the vast array of monitoring literature produced at the global, regional and/or country level by a wide range of organisations, agencies and governments. One such example, is with UN-Water, which through a WHO initiative, led the preparation of the GLAAS report. Not only is it exploring new ways in presenting a rounded picture of the sector, complementing information provided by the JMP and World Water Development Reports (WWDR), it also aims to provide a comprehensive mechanism to allow policy-makers to look at the how the pieces of the puzzle fit into the global picture (Steduto, P., 2008). Could this ultimately replace or subsume the JMP and WWDR or is it yet another monitoring report adding to the information overload?

Meanwhile civil society organisations are also contributing to the information deluge. Water for People have recently developed their Field Level Operations Watch (FLOW) programme to obtain baseline and monitoring data ascertaining what is working, what is on the verge of disrepair and what is broken. WaterAid has developed the water point mapping concept in an attempt to streamline and simplify monitoring progress and the International Water Association (IWA) have developed a new improved benchmarking approach and reporting framework for the urban/networked water sector, all deemed to be providing valuable information but at what cost and what systems are they replacing or duplicating?

Perhaps we need to consider what is driving this incessant need for creating the new whilst rarely stopping to learn the lessons from the existing information. Are we over-investing in new monitoring approaches to mask our frustration at the slow progress in reaching the old targets? Perhaps we need to stop re-inventing these tools and reporting frameworks and rather work together in agreeing a core set of data in order to at least provide a baseline from which comparative analysis can be undertaken. The creativity can continue around the periphery as long as this agreed set of primary indicators are regularly, consistently and, as reasonably accurately measured, reported and in turn reflected upon.

Both the concepts of M&E, as well as water management, have been around for thousands of years, although it is only really with the gearing up of international development and the “war on poverty” that M&E has taken on a new form in an attempt to support ‘accelerated development’. Whether at a programme level where the primary stakeholders strive to get consistency across a single programme, or at a global level whereby attempting to get consistency from those regional and national data sets, the challenge is a shared one. Remembering the ‘M’ in the Minimum Evaluation Procedures, simplified M&E at project level, but M&E in a form which can be delivered easily into an ongoing national database, may be all that is actually usable. Our over-investment in new and ever ‘improved’ planning and M&E might be better used in supporting communities to maintain their existing systems. ‘Beyond the MDG’s’ comes the more mundane task of capital maintenance of these expensive new systems. The MEP approach makes plain there is little value in impact evaluation of systems which are not working. Perhaps the key indicator is one that ‘measures’ institutional capability to support communities in their ongoing operations and maintenance responsibilities?

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