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A Qualitative Analysis of Rural Water Sector Policy Documents

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ABSTRACT: This paper summarises the findings of a review of policy and strategy documents published circa 2008 by a diverse set of eleven development partners in the rural water sector. It was carried out as part of the Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale) Initiative using a Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) approach to assess the extent to which the reviewed documents align with a set of 'building blocks' identified by Triple-S as integral to ensuring sustainable service delivery in the rural water sector. Based on the reviewed documents, the policies of the development partners included in this analysis demonstrate a clear commitment towards a number of important elements believed to be necessary for sustainable service delivery including learning and adaptive management, coordination and collaboration, capacity support for local government, and harmonisation and alignment. However, the analysis of the policy documents results in low scores for planning for asset management (i.e. renewals) and recognition and promotion of alternative service delivery options to community management (e.g. Self-supply of, or delegated management to, the private sector). Thus, this study indicates that these areas, considered by Triple-S to be crucial for improving sustainability, are relatively neglected and merit more attention in the policies of organisations.

KEYWORDS: Rural water, sustainability, policy, qualitative document analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the last 30 years, billions of dollars have been invested in rural water infrastructure, often based on demand-driven approaches and community management (Lockwood and Smits, 2011). Whilst this has led to increased coverage, in many places it has resulted in unreliable and poor service levels. The Rural Water Supply Network estimates that 36% of hand pumps in sub-Saharan Africa do not work at any given time (RWSN, 2009) whilst a study by WaterAid in Tanzania found that two years after installation, 25% of systems were not functioning (Taylor, 2009). This type of failure has wasted huge sums of money and has resulted in very poor levels of service to rural communities.

Whilst the Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation reports that the drinking water target of the global Millennium Development Goal (MDG) was met in 2010 (UNICEF/WHO, 2012), millions are still without access to safe drinking water, and the lack of sustainability of systems means that many of those classified as 'served' risk returning to unsafe sources. The 2012 UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) shows that in many countries, despite increased political commitments to WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), financial and human resources are inadequate to sustain existing infrastructure and increase access. There is consequently a real risk of slippage on the gains made in improving water services (WHO, 2012).

To improve the sustainability of rural water services it is increasingly recognised that there needs to be a shift from the traditional approach of implementing stand-alone projects, focusing primarily on

infrastructure, to one that emphasises the delivery of sustainable water services (Lockwood and Smits, 2011) and that effectively managing existing assets to sustain water services is as important as providing new infrastructure (WHO, 2012). This service delivery approach also requires learning and adaptive capacity and a harmonised and aligned sector (Lockwood and Smits, 2011).

The Sustainable Services at Scale ('Triple-S')[1] initiative is working to support the sector to improve the sustainability of rural water services. Sustainability in this context is defined as "whether or not something continues to work over time" (Abrams et al., 1998), and, therefore whether water continues to flow over time. This paper reports on the findings of a Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) to assess the extent to which policies of development partners address issues of sustainability as part of Triple-S and is based on its research and concepts.

BACKGROUND

Frameworks for sustainability of rural water supply services

A study into the rural water sector in 13 different countries carried out by Triple-S (Lockwood and Smits, 2011) found that ten critical factors are pivotal to the important shift from infrastructure projects to sustainable services. These ten factors can be thought of as 'building blocks' for sustainable service delivery. They were designed to complement Triple-S' 'principles framework' (Triple-S, 2012) – a conceptual tool set of eight principles across the three pillars of service delivery approach, learning and adaptive capacity, and harmonisation and alignment, in relation to the differing levels of consumers, water service providers, water service authorities, national governments and the international community.

The Triple-S building blocks comprise one of many frameworks used to assess sustainability of services. In our analysis, there are broadly two groups of frameworks: those developed to monitor or assess the degree of sustainability for particular projects; and conceptual principle-based frameworks designed to orient the development of sustainability measures prior to project or programme development.

The first group of sustainability monitoring frameworks includes those by, for example, Kaliba and Norman, 2004; Sara and Katz, 2005; Godfrey et al., 2009; Fogelberg and Betancourt, 2009; Adhikari and Bhattarai, 2010; and Schweitzer and Mihelcic, 2012. They tend to focus on providing accountability for sustainability to donors and trigger improvement in programmes. They have also been used for research purposes. Most of these frameworks include some institutional, social, managerial, technical and financial aspects. Some of these frameworks are designed specifically for ongoing project monitoring using a set of defined questions, such as USAID-Rotary International H_2O Collaboration's WASH Sustainability Index Tool (USAID-Rotary, 2013) which allows assessment of institutional, management, financial and technical factors across a range of different types of water points. In Ghana, the Community Water and Sanitation Agency has developed its own framework to improve the monitoring of rural water services using indictors involving management and governance, financial management, operational indicators and support functions (CWSA and IRC, 2012).

The other group of conceptual frameworks do not go into prescriptive detail as some project-specific frameworks do. This group includes WaterAid's Sustainability Framework (WaterAid, 2011) which outlines 14 issues to be addressed for any rural community-based management water supply service.

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[1] Triple-S is a six-year research project running from 2009 to 2014, led by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It seeks to contribute to a shift from an 'infrastructure perspective' to a service delivery approach for the rural water sector through action research in Ghana, Uganda and Burkina Faso (the latter funded by USAID); working with government and sector stakeholders; research, documentation and dissemination; and international partnerships and advocacy. For details about Triple-S see: www.waterservicesthatlast.org

The Triple-S building blocks also fit into this conceptual grouping, and differ from WaterAid's Sustainability Framework in that they are designed to be adaptable to any location, type of water point and management structure. The WASH Sustainability Charter (2011) is another broad framework, with five guiding principles. Like the building blocks it goes beyond the immediate scope of a project to also encompass wider sectoral issues such as collaboration with local and governmental stakeholders and knowledge-sharing.

Whilst the Triple-S building blocks hold some similarities with other sustainability frameworks they differ by including issues which other frameworks generally do not, such as professionalisation of community management, recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options (such as delegated management and self-supply), asset management and regulation – areas which Triple-S believe are emerging as priorities for sector reform.

Triple-S made a conscious decision to be consistent in the use of one framework across the initiative in order to ensure clarity of messaging to partners and stakeholders. The building blocks were therefore used as the basis for the QDA and are outlined in the methodology section.

Qualitative document analysis

QDA is a method of analysing documents in a rigorous and systematic manner to assess the treatment of particular 'themes' or issues. It is used in political science to facilitate impartial and dependable analysis of written policies (Altheide, 1996; Wesley, 2011). In QDA, researchers analyse document content, analysing the meaning and implications of text, which distinguishes it from quantitative word analysis (e.g. through the use of software programmes such as WordStat which analyse frequency of key words). QDA's specific focus on written documents also distinguishes it from other forms of political science research which analyse spoken or written discourses. QDA can provide important insights based on the documents used and can serve as one data source that can be triangulated with others, and as a platform for discussion and further analysis.

The International Workstream[2] of Triple-S conducted QDA on a selected group of development partners' policy, strategy and guideline documents to understand the extent to which these documents incorporated the ten building blocks. This could then enable Triple-S to establish a 'baseline' of sector policy pre-2008, for comparison with future policy changes as a way to monitor whether development partners adopt the concepts of a service delivery approach, as defined by the Triple-S building blocks, in their written documents (a second round of QDA will be carried out at the end of the Triple-S project period in 2014); analyse the congruence between policy documents and practice-related documents (e.g. calls for proposals, project reports); and serve as a tool for constructive engagement, identifying specific areas for improvement in the overall water sector and for individual organisations. This paper discusses the results of the QDA conducted on policy documents circa 2008,[3] and does not include the results of the 'practice' document analysis.

The 2008 policy QDA exercise can provide valuable information on the recent policies of development partners in the rural water sector. While this can be helpful in order to identify any changes that may have occurred over time (i.e. comparing the results of this exercise with the QDA that is scheduled to take place in 2014), arguably more important is the opportunity to specifically identify areas of strength and weakness in order to facilitate change. Due to the long-term nature of policy development, it is envisioned that the findings of the QDA may contribute to changes in the written

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[2] The International Workstream of Triple-S works collaboratively with a range of national governments, IFIs, donors, NGOs and other development partners to influence approaches to rural water sector support, as well as develop and promote practical tools for improved sustainability

[3] Policy documents analysed were dated around 2008, with the exception of two development partners which did not have such documents available until 2010 and 2011.

policies and strategies of development partners. This aligns with the Triple-S theory of change (Schouten and Moriarty, 2013) which includes an element of 'invocacy'[4] (Carriger, 2012), by which Triple-S is a partner and facilitator, "capitalizing on the energy and intent of sector organisations to own and create change". Through specifically identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in the written policies and strategies of the Triple-S development partners, Triple-S aims to empower these organisations to shift further towards sustainable service delivery.

Throughout the implementation of this exercise, it was widely acknowledged by the members of Triple-S that written policy and strategy documents constitute only one element of policy. The implications of this on how we assess changes in policy have been discussed at length in the political and social sciences (see e.g. Carden, 2004; Steven, 2007; Jones, 2011). Further, it is widely acknowledged that changes in written policies do not necessarily directly translate to changed practices on the ground, and changes in practice may occur in the absence of changed policy (Brunsson, 2003). Despite this, the team does recognise the value of written policies and the potential effects on practice that changes in these policies can have.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Eleven development partners[5] were included in the policy QDA: four multilateral donor agencies, three bilateral donor agencies and four NGOs (non-governmental organisations). Criteria for inclusion were (a) current engagement with the Triple-S initiative and (b) appropriate policy, strategy or guideline documents available in the public domain. The partners included were as follows:

Multilateral donor agencies:
- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- European Union (EU)
- Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
- UNICEF

Bilateral donor agencies:
- Australia Agency for International Development (AusAID).
- Denmark's Development Cooperation (DANIDA).
- UK Department for International Development (DFID).

NGOs:
- Engineers without Borders, Canada (EWB)
- Living Water International (LWI)
- Water For People
- WaterAid

This QDA review used the Triple-S building blocks, outlined in Table 1 below,[6] as an analytical framework to assess likely sustainability of rural water policies provided in published documents. Whilst additional factors may also be useful to ensure sustainable rural water services, such as water resources management or multiple use systems (MUS), these building blocks give a useful framework to outline the issues which should be considered for sustainable rural water services, according to Triple-S. There is a risk that simplifying research for policy may miss complexities which characterise the real world

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[4] 'Invocacy' is a term used by Triple-S to explain the approach of relationship building with individuals as a means of bringing about change inside organisations rather than using an advocacy approach of creating pressure for change from the outside.

[5] The partners included were: AfDB, AusAID, DANIDA, DFID, EU, EWB Canada, IDB, Living Water International, UNICEF, Water for People and WaterAid.

[6] More information on the 'building blocks' can be found at: www.waterservicesthatlast.org/resources/building_blocks

(Cleaver and Franks, 2008). However, these building blocks aim to be flexible, accepting that there is no such thing as a 'silver bullet' but rather that the local context is crucial. The building blocks therefore aim to guide thinking and be convenient for use by both policy-makers and practitioners.

Table 1. The Triple-S building blocks for sustainability.

1. Professionalisation of community management	Community management entities supported to move away from voluntary arrangements towards more professional service provision that is embedded in local and national policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks.
2. Recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options	A range of management options beyond community management, such as self-supply and public-private partnerships, formally recognised and supported in sector policy.
3. Monitoring service delivery and sustainability	Monitoring systems track indicators of infrastructure functionality, service provider performance, and levels of service delivered against nationally agreed norms and standards.
4. Harmonisation and coordination[7]	Improved harmonisation and coordination among donors and government, and alignment of all actors (both government and non-government) with national policies and systems.
5. Support to service providers	Structured system of direct (post-construction) support provided to back up and monitor community management entities and other service providers.
6. Capacity support to local government	Ongoing capacity support provided to service authorities (typically local government) to enable them to fulfil their role (planning, monitoring, regulation, etc) in sustaining rural water services.
7. Learning and adaptive management	Learning and knowledge management supported at national and decentralised levels to enable the sector to adapt based on experience.
8. Asset management	Systematic planning, inventory updates, and financial forecasting for assets carried out, and asset ownership clearly defined.
9. Regulation of rural services and service providers	Regulation of the services delivered and service provider performance through mechanisms appropriate for small rural operators.
10. Financing to cover all life-cycle costs	Financial frameworks account for all life-cycle costs, especially major capital maintenance, support to service authorities and service providers, monitoring and regulation.

The following stages were followed to carry out the QDA: (i) obtaining documents, (ii) identifying themes for analysis, (iii) analysis of documents, (iv) validation, and (v) finalisation and overall analysis. These are explained in detail below.

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[7] In analysing the documents, harmonisation and coordination were considered separately as 'harmonisation and alignment' with national policies and systems, and 'coordination and collaboration' between organisations, for a more nuanced analysis of this building block.

Obtaining documents

This QDA was conducted on rural water-related policy and strategy documents. It only provides information about these written documents, dated approximately 2008 or earlier,[8] to coincide with the start of the Triple-S initiative. The QDA aimed to focus primarily on policy documents of development partners with which Triple-S is actively engaged. Where policy documents were not available, similar documents such as strategy or guideline documents were analysed. Organisations that did not have such documents available were not included (e.g. the World Bank). If multiple documents were available with different emphases, such as in the case of the EU, then each document was assessed and a combined summary produced. Where only one specialised document was available, such as in the case of Danida where only a finance-focused document was found, an analysis was conducted, noting that the nature of the document may have affected the inclusion and scope of discussion of themes. Whilst some of these documents have since been superseded, there is still value in presenting their results to show the state of the sector at the time. While some may appear 'old', the policy that they outline may be implemented for an extended period of time. For example, the UNICEF document from 2006 covers the organisation's strategies for the ten year period of 2006 to 2015.

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses in these policy documents may help to show where change in the rural water sector is still required, in addition to providing nuanced information about the documents of the individual partners. Policy change is often slow – as Cleaver and Franks (2008: 162) state "policy making tends towards incrementalism: 'doing more and doing it better' is favoured over 'doing it differently'". It is hoped that displaying the results for these organisations may encourage all organisations to reflect as to whether their policies adequately include the key issues included in the Triple-S building blocks, which are believed to be required for sustainable rural water services.

The following publicly available documents that most closely relate to rural water policy were analysed:

- Africa Development Bank (AfDB). 2005. *Rural water supply and sanitation initiative. Framework for implementation*.

- Australia Agency for International Development (AusAID). 2003. *Making every drop count: Water and Australian aid.*

- Denmark's Development Cooperation (Danida). 2007. *Financing mechanisms for peri-urban, small towns and rural water supply. Good practice paper*.

- Engineers without Borders (EWB), Canada. 2009. *Malawi water and sanitation program. Water point functionality and distribution strategy 2009-2012*.

- EuropeAid. 2009. *Water sector development and governance complementarities and synergies between sector-wide approach and integrated water resource management*.

- European Commission (EC). 2008. Programming guide for strategy papers. Water and sanitation.

- European Union Water Initiative (EUWI). 2006. *Strategy for development of the EUWI*

- Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). 2007. *Water and Sanitation Initiative.*

- Living Water International (LWI). 2011. *Strategic plan summary 2011-2015.*

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[8] Living Water International and Water for People did not have strategy documents available pre-2009, and therefore documents from 2011 and 2010 were analysed respectively, anticipating that these documents were close enough within reason to our 2009 time frame to be included. While it may be expected that newer documents would receive better scores in this assessment as the sector improves over time, there appears to be no overall correlations between date and score in our sample.

- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2006. *UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene strategies for 2006-2015*.

- UK Department for International Development (DFID). 2008. *Water: An increasingly precious resource. Sanitation: A matter of dignity*.

- WaterAid. 2005. *WaterAid's strategy 2005-2010*.

- Water for People (WfP). 2010. *Strategic Plan 2010-2014.*

Identify themes

The ten Triple-S building blocks were used for the themes, as defined earlier in this paper, although one of them, 'harmonisation and coordination', was divided into the separate components of 'harmonisation and alignment' with national policies and systems, and 'coordination and collaboration' between organisations. This was done to differentiate between aligning with national government policies and collaborating more broadly with others in the sector. Again, these ten building blocks are deemed by Triple-S to be essential basic considerations; they may not be comprehensive (i.e. other factors may also be required) and are not considered to be a silver bullet.

Analysis of documents

Each document was analysed to determine the extent of alignment with each theme or 'building block'. This was done through analysing the meanings of the text, rather than relying on the presence and frequency of key words. Interpretations were supported by explanations and quotations in summary tables for each organisation. The analysis was done using an auditable process with assessment summaries produced for each document, as well as the original annotated documents available to aid review and verification.

The strength of support for each theme in the documents was then categorised as one of: 'high alignment' with the Triple-S building block; 'partial alignment' with the building block; 'limited alignment' with the building block (lacking detail or with limited evidence that the document aligned with the theme); 'unclear alignment' with 'the building block (the theme was mentioned briefly, but details were lacking as to whether the document pointed to aligning with the theme or not); or 'no alignment' with the building block.

Validation

A check of the analysis was carried out by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Impact and Learning Team (ILT).[9] The primary analyser was part of the Triple-S International Workstream team and was therefore familiar with the building blocks. Validation of the analysis by someone external from Triple-S therefore aimed to improve reliability, credibility, dependability and impartiality. It helped to avoid bias or unsubstantiated assumptions about particular organisations with which Triple-S was actively working and ensured that the analysis and conclusions were based only on what was clearly written in the documents.

Finalisation and overall analysis

Following the completion of both rounds (primary and validator) of analysis, the two researchers discussed the rationale behind their scores and decided on a final score. Overall, the difference in scoring between the primary analyser and the validator was minimal. The primary and secondary analyser differed in their scores in 25% of cases, or on 27 occasions. Following discussion between the

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[9] www.ids.ac.uk/team/impact-and-learning-team

two assessors approximately half of these differing cases were changed to match the score of the validator (nine cases were 'increased' (improved score); three were decreased; one changed from 'no alignment' to 'unclear alignment'), and half remained unchanged. No scores were changed by more than one degree.

The following is an example showing slight differences in scoring between the primary analyser and the validator:

Table 2. Example of the analysing and validation process.

Theme ('Building block'): Financing to cover all life-cycle costs			
Analysis of the document	Primary analyser	Validator	Final score
Cost recovery is only properly discussed for O&M, or to "achieve cost recovery to the extent possible", which does not point to planning for full life-cycle costs. Communities are "fully responsible for O&M" and governments are to subsidise major capital replacements. Other direct and indirect support costs are not considered. "Financial appraisal assesses the financial sustainability of the programmes in terms of financing the programme/ project and post-investment in O&M"	Score: 'Limited alignment'. Rationale: only costs considered are for O&M and subsidies for capital replacements. No other direct or indirect costs considered.	Score: 'Partial alignment'. Rationale: costs for O&M covered by communities; governments to assist with major capital replacements. Financial stability of the projects assessed.	Score: 'Partial alignment'. Rationale: cost recovery for O&M covered by communities; governments to subsidise major capital replacements.

Once the primary analyser and validator agreed on the final results, analysis was undertaken for the sector overall, and for individual organisations.

Results have also been translated into graphical representations. In these graphs, 'no alignment' and 'unclear alignment' have been grouped together.

While the team distinguished between 'no alignment' and 'unclear alignment' in the analysis, the two categories were grouped together in the presentation of findings. Throughout the exercise, a number of contextual discussions took place among the Triple-S team as to the implications of a specific document not demonstrating alignment with a specific building block. Given the different scopes of the documents, the lack of evidence showing alignment to a building block might not necessarily mean that it was absent in the organisation's policies and practices. On the other hand, the lack of discussion of an issue in a policy or strategy document could equally indicate its lack of consideration or prioritisation by the organisation.

The team therefore stresses the importance of nuanced analysis (in addition to looking at the aggregates) as well as engagement with the partners for further validating and grounding the findings. Triple-S has continued to engage with each of the development partners included in this analysis, and has received valuable feedback about the overall QDA exercise. In general, many of the partners expressed that the findings echoed their own perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses.

RESULTS

Here we present a summary of the findings of the 2008 policy QDA, showing how each document scores in relation to the Triple-S building blocks. The organisations included in the QDA have been grouped into broad categories for analysis: multilateral donor agencies, bilateral donor agencies, and NGOs. We present an overview and graphical representation of the results for each of these categories, as well as a brief summary of each individual partner.

Multilateral donor agency document results

Multilateral donor agencies tend to support governments, often through funding mechanisms, although the provision of technical support is also common. It is appropriate therefore that the themes of harmonisation, coordination and capacity support to local government have 'high alignment' in each of the multilateral documents, as can be seen in Figure 1. Some of the building blocks may be more appropriate to appear in documents of implementing agencies, such as monitoring service delivery and sustainability, and recognition and support of alternative service provider options; however, since technical support may be available it could be argued that clear aims in policy documents for these areas would also be beneficial. One area particularly lacking was asset management. For organisations predominantly involved in providing finance to the rural water sector, ignoring this important finance issue may significantly impact on the sustainability of services.

Figure 1. Multilateral donor agency document results.
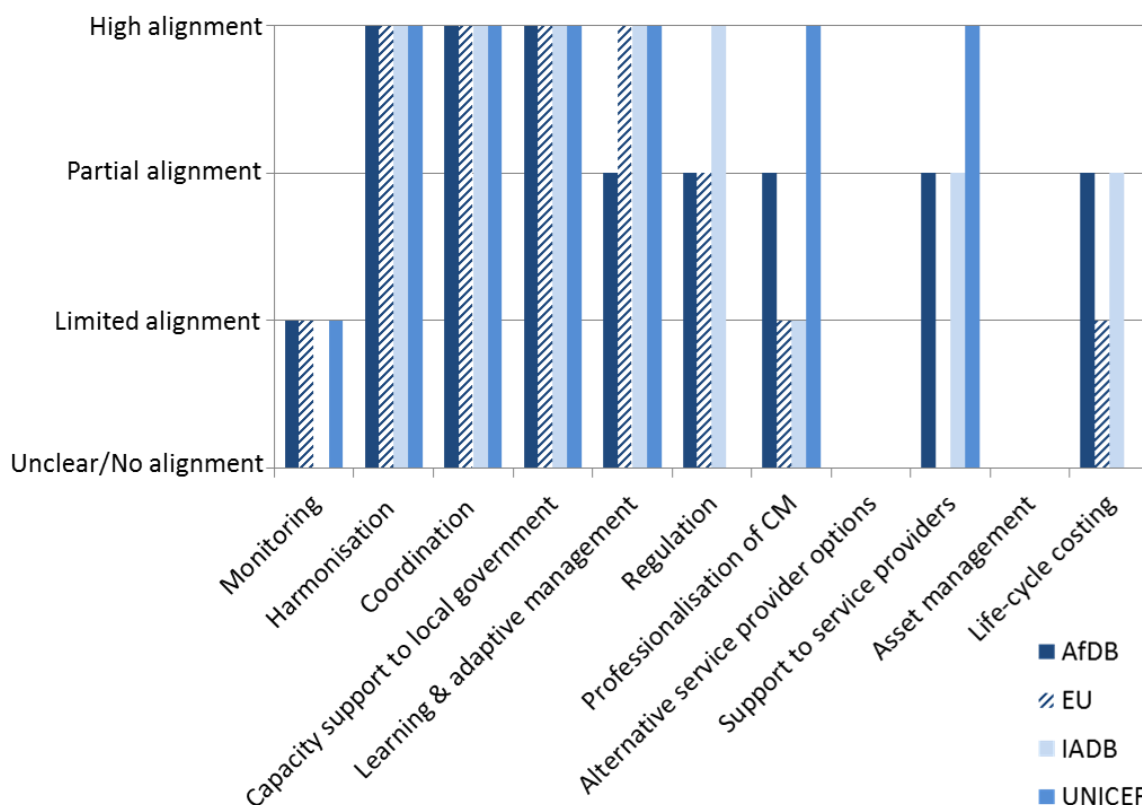
AfDB

The AfDB document (AfDB, 2005) is the 'Framework for Implementation' of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative. It includes a specific section on 'sustainability', which covers just over one page.

The document received 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' scores in eight out of the 11 themes with 'high alignment' results in harmonisation and alignment, with government-led strategies and Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAps) clearly supported; coordination and collaboration; and capacity support to local government, with the document indicating that local government capacity-building is to be included in all country programmes.

'Monitoring service delivery and sustainability' received weak alignment scores, with a focus on monitoring access rather than on service delivery – the number of people served, amount of money spent, and number and type of facilities realised are the key progress and achievement measures, rather than monitoring sustainability issues including financial, institutional and managerial issues. This is somewhat typical of a 'traditional' rural water supply approach, focusing on infrastructure rather than on less tangible issues believed to be required for indefinite service provision. Although it was recognised that local governments should continuously monitor community-managed systems, there was no mention of AfDB programmes supporting or linking to national monitoring systems and no details of local government monitoring requirements.

There was no evidence of 'recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options' with community management appearing to be the only supported option. 'Asset management' was also lacking, although it was stated that governments were expected to subsidise major capital replacements. The only cost component clearly included was O&M, for which communities were "fully responsible" and consequently financing to cover all life-cycle costs scored 'partial alignment'.

IDB

The IDB document (IDB, 2007) outlines the plans for the Bank's Water and Sanitation Initiative to support member countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation, including a medium-term action plan for 2007-2011 with a special programme for 3,000 rural communities. It scored 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' for seven themes, scoring 'high alignment' in harmonisation and alignment through supporting countries in a manner "consistent with the countries' responsibilities and wishes"; coordination and collaboration through engaging with different stakeholders; capacity support to local government; and learning and adaptive management, including carrying out and disseminating research and learning at events, through networks and feeding lessons learnt into their programmes. The IDB document was one of only two reviewed overall that received 'high alignment' scores for regulation as it stressed the importance of capacity-building for regulatory institutions and frameworks with "regulation and accountability to make the sector more transparent" included under the section 'Create institutions instrumental for sustainable development' of the document.

There was limited evidence of alignment with the professionalisation of community management building block, with some support for technical assistance but still an emphasis on reliance on communities' own abilities – their programme of providing financing and technical assistance for 3000 rural communities was "based on communities' own capacity, empowering them and enabling them to take their own organizational, technical, and financial decisions" whilst they offer technical assistance to construct and operate water systems.

There was no inclusion of alternatives to community management: while there was some recognition that there is no 'one size fits all' approach, the focus of the document was community management. Asset management was scored as 'no alignment' as details on planning for replacements were absent.

UNICEF

The UNICEF document (UNICEF, 2006) describes UNICEF's strategies for water, sanitation and hygiene covering the period 2006-2015 to assist "governments, communities and families to achieve specific

targets relating to the Millennium Development Goals". It received 'high alignment' scores for six themes, although four themes also received scores of 'no alignment' or 'unclear alignment'. It received 'high alignment' scores In harmonisation and alignment, being supportive of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans and SWAps; coordination and collaboration; capacity support to local government; and learning and adaptive management. It also scored 'high alignment' in professionalisation of community management, since it included the use of private entrepreneurships and ensuring communities are supported with clear roles and responsibilities; and also for support to service providers, although the emphasis was only on community management as service provider as no other options were included in the document. Consequently, recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options scored 'no alignment'.

Regulation was not mentioned and therefore scored 'no alignment'. There was also a lack of alignment with both of the finance-related building blocks – information on asset management was very unclear whilst the only mention of finance was related to creating awareness of budget requirements to achieve the MDGs and for sustainability to depend on the "financial (…) support capacity of intermediate-level actors", amongst other things. It was therefore given the result 'no alignment'.

EU

Three EU documents were assessed as they all seemed to cover part of rural water sector policy. EU, 2006 is the strategy for development of the EU Water Initiative; EC, 2008 is the European Commission's Programming Guide for Strategy Papers on water and sanitation; and EuropeAid, 2009 is a guidance tool for European Commission Delegations and "other partners" on the Sector-Wide approach and Integrated Water Resources Management. The final score given was the best of all three documents, given that each one was limited in its scope. The result was scores of 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' for five themes. A 'high alignment' score was given for harmonisation and alignment, it being one of the main purposes of setting up EUWI, as well as supporting SWAps; coordination and collaboration; capacity support to local government; and learning and adaptive management.

The areas with the weakest alignment to the building blocks in this assessment were recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options; direct support to service providers; and asset management, with no information provided on any of these building blocks in the documents analysed. Professionalisation of community management received a 'limited alignment' score since the EuropeAid document mentioned capacity-building of user associations and also service management contracts but it was not clear if this was for rural areas. Life-cycle costing was also scored as 'limited alignment' with some discussion of "sustainable financing" (EUWI, 2006), although details on this were lacking, and also ensuring tariffs are affordable and subsidised by government (EuropeAid, 2009), but there was nothing to suggest that all costs were planned and accounted for.

Bilateral donor agency document results

Bilateral donor agencies often provide direct support to governments, but they may also fund their own, and others' programmes, similar to multilateral donor agencies that provide technical support. It could therefore be argued that they need to embrace all of the factors included in the building blocks.

The 'building block' on which this group of donors scored lowest was in monitoring, predominantly because they followed a 'traditional' approach of counting beneficiaries or access, rather than monitoring for sustainability. There may be strong political pressure at home on bilateral donor agencies to show accountability for their budgets and demonstrate value for money. Tangible results such as numbers of people granted access to water is a simple measure, perceived to be easy for the general public to digest. However, this focus on numbers of people, rather than meaningful indications that those people will continue to access services in the future has been long recognised as counter-productive across many sectors (Sanderson, 2003; Eyben, 2013). The findings from this analysis further

support the idea that in the rural water sector there is a challenge to change how accountability is done to ensure long-term sustainability.

The only 'building block' seen to be clearly supported in all of the bilateral donor agency documents in this analysis was learning and adaptive management. This is promising since it suggests that there is commitment to learning and continual improvement within these organisations to bring about better outcomes for their programmes. It is hoped that research such as this study will support these types of organisations in their drive to improve. However, whether there is a culture of learning and adaptive management in practice in the organisation cannot be obtained from an analysis of this document.

Figure 2. Bilateral donor agency document results.
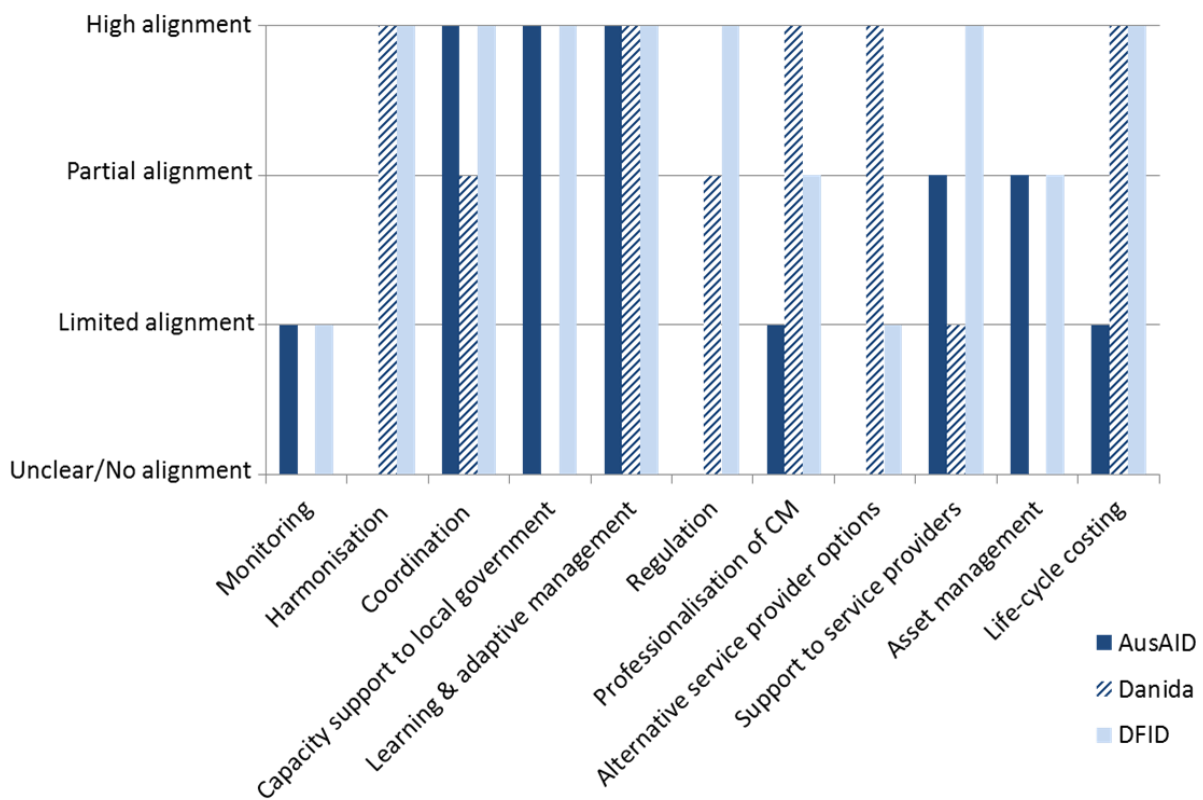
AusAID

The AusAID document (AusAID, 2003) outlines how Australia's aid programme will support "developing country partners" to address water and sanitation issues, emphasising water governance, efficiency of existing water systems and access. It scored 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' for five out of the 11 themes. It received 'high alignment' scoring for coordination and collaboration, but it was unclear whether it supported harmonisation and alignment and so was classed as 'unclear alignment' for this theme. It also scored as 'high alignment' for capacity support to local government, aiming to "strengthen capacity at all levels of partner governments to manage water resources" and for learning and adaptive capacity, notably providing online resources for learning in the sector.

There was no mention of alternative service provider options to community management and whilst the document mentioned support to communities, details in this area were lacking and so it was scored as 'limited alignment' for professionalisation of community management. Regulation was mentioned, but it was unclear whether this was only for the urban sector and so has been scored as 'unclear alignment'. Monitoring was also of 'limited alignment' it being mentioned only in relation to

strengthening capacity of governments "to use hydro-meteorological and other data" and monitoring water quality. Finally, financing to cover all life-cycle costs was seen to be 'limited alignment' with only tariffs being discussed: "ensure pricing reforms take account of the capacity of the poor to pay connection and user costs. This could include assistance in setting appropriate tariffs and water service standards, and advice on cross-subsidisation" (AusAID 2003).

It scored 'partial alignment' for asset management, stating that it will "help government and local communities to develop asset maintenance and management plans".

Danida

The Danida document (Danida, 2007) focused on financing mechanisms for peri-urban, small town and rural water supplies. Due to the emphasis on finance in this document it may not be expected to cover all of the 'building block' areas. It scored 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' for seven themes. It received 'high alignment' for harmonisation and alignment, with clear support for SWAps, budgetary support and basket funding to "avoid donor competition". It was also scored as 'high alignment' for learning and adaptive management, aiming to disseminate new aid modalities and financial approaches through "for example learnt papers and the annual water seminar"; professionalisation of community management, with lease contracts supported and responsibilities for maintenance clearly defined:

> [p]rovided the government maintains ownership to facilities, community management or lease contracts would clearly place and define the specific responsibility for maintenance to avoid malfunctioning and reduction of the physical lifetime of facilities (Danida, 2007);

and recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options, as it supports a variety of options for service delivery including self-supply by communities or entrepreneurs and public or private sector provision and support, including using lease contracts. Financing to cover all life-cycle costs was also 'high alignment', covering O&M and replacement costs, plus possible contributions from national budgets to help cover support costs. It recognised that more finance is not enough, but cost recovery and "commitment from governments, users and operators as well as political will" are also required, as well as acknowledging that there is generally a lack of funding for "sustainable operation and maintenance and future replacement of existing facilities". It recommended that "the target for schemes in rural areas, small towns and peri-urban areas should be to reach O&M and replacement cost recovery over a fixed period of time". Planning for asset management was mentioned, but it lacked clarity and so was scored as 'unclear alignment'.

The Danida document focused on finance and so it is not surprising that more operational areas including monitoring, capacity support to local government and direct support to service providers were not covered in this document.

DFID

The DFID document (DFID, 2008) outlines the water policy of the UK to tackle the Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation. It focused on four priority areas: economic growth, fragile states, climate change and the international 'architecture' of aid. It received nine 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' scores – the largest amount for any organisation in this analysis. Builiding blocks that were scored as 'high alignment' were: harmonisation and alignment, encouraging programmes "to recognise that solutions cannot be imposed on countries", instead supporting country's own plans; coordination and collaboration, aiming to play an active role in increasing coordination; capacity support to local government, stating it would "help governments to build capacity for the planning and provision of water and sanitation services at all levels"; learning and adaptive management, supporting "innovative multilateral initiatives" and "developing a water research programme that helps to fill critical knowledge gaps".

It also scored 'high alignment' for regulation, stating the need for "governments to put proper regulations in place and clearly set out objectives for service providers"; direct support to service providers, with recognition that service providers "need good managerial systems, access to spare parts and support from local and central government" and that communities in particular need support:

> [t]oo often, the expectation that communities will be responsible for all future maintenance has resulted in these systems breaking down…;

and lastly on financing to cover all life-cycle costs, stating the need for financing replacement, ongoing support and different funding mechanisms:

> the costs of operating and maintaining systems and ultimately of replacing capital, must be covered somehow – either through user fees or government taxes or by means of external support;

> we advocate that a balance should be struck between developing new infrastructure and investing in systems to manage what is already in place. And as progress is made towards achieving the MDG targets, this balance should tip towards maintenance.

The two building blocks to which the DFID document was least aligned were: monitoring, where it was unclear if it refered to simply monitoring access rather than service delivery; and recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options as there was an emphasis on community management. Where the private sector was mentioned it was not clear that it applied to a rural context. Both of these themes received a 'limited alignment' score.

NGO document results

NGOs come in many shapes and sizes. This analysis includes a variety of types and sizes of NGOs. Whilst they cannot claim to represent the entire NGO sector the analysis does show gaps in particular areas across this sample which may reflect the state of thinking for many other NGOs. Some of these gaps are in the higher-level issues such as regulation, with which these organisations may feel like they cannot realistically get involved; however, other gaps may be because NGOs may support traditional community management models (the NGOs reviewed received very weak alignment scoring for alternative service provider options) and are structured to provide fixed term 'projects' to improve access. This may in part be linked to accountability and basic monitoring statistics which allow simple reporting back to donors, although monitoring itself did not score too badly. Mixed results for the harmonisation 'building block' may be more revealing, suggesting that there is a lack of alignment with national targets and standards by these types of organisations and that they instead apply their own norms and standards (EWB Canada is the exception to this). This type of approach can result in less efficient and effective use of funds as well as difficulties in monitoring and ongoing support from a national level which is believed to be key to long-term sustainability once the NGO leaves (Lockwood and Smits, 2011).

EWB Canada

The EWB Canada document (EWB Canada, 2009) summarises how the EWB Water and Sanitation Program "seeks to improve access to water and sanitation for Malawians". It scored 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' five times out of 11. Whilst it received four 'high alignment' scores, it also received six 'unclear/no alignment' scores. The document was quite short in length which could in part explain the lack of information on these areas, or it may reflect the emphasis of their work. It was scored as 'high alignment' for: harmonisation and alignment, consulting with national government and being the lead for technical assistance for the launch of Malawi's SWAp (the only country where they work on rural water supply):

Figure 3. NGO document results.
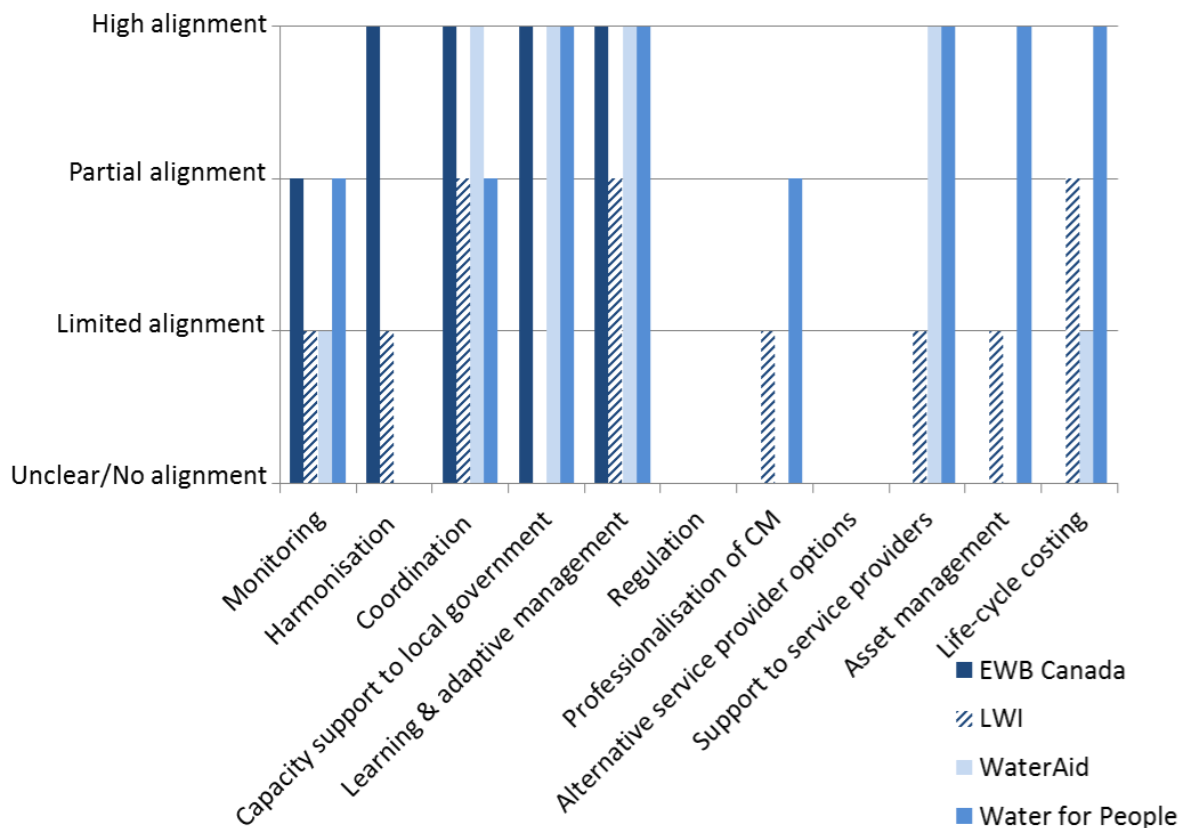
We consistently consult national government stakeholders on all our projects including those within the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development;

coordination and collaboration, with both NGOs and government; capacity support to local government:

we have piloted many innovative district support methods including a leadership and personal development program for young leaders, coaching services for district water and sanitation management, improved inter-district learning through targeted exchanges, developing new district-led forums for regular communication, and incorporating effective adult learning techniques in national trainings;

and also learning and adaptive management, including "increasing feedback communication from the field to the national level" to bring learning in the sector and improved decision-making. Monitoring was scored as 'partial alignment' as the document indicated that EWB supports strengthening national monitoring, although it was not clear whether this was solely for functionality or whether other aspects of service are monitored.

There was no information regarding support to service providers, but this may be because the emphasis is on supporting organisations at a higher level with the aim that they in turn support the service providers.

There was a lack of evidence of aligning with other building blocks, including professionalisation of community management and alternative service provider options. This may indicate that EWB Canada, like many other smaller NGOs, takes a traditional approach favouring community management.

Living Water International

The Living Water International document (LWI, 2011) is a summary of the organisation's strategic plan for 2011-2015. It received three 'partial alignment' scores. None of the themes were classed as 'high alignment'. The document scored 'partial alignment' for: coordination and collaboration, with "collaborative partnerships" with large foundations, other NGOs and governmental agencies being developed "to propel the piloting and development of new and expanded programs"; learning and adaptive management, with a focus on internal learning, although less so externally; and financing to cover all life-cycle costs, as it encouraged finance from communities to eventually replace systems.

Community-based management was the focus for service delivery (therefore no evidence to support alternative service provider options), and a traditional approach of "community capacity-building" and maintenance programmes reflect an infrastructure rather than a service delivery approach. There were therefore 'limited alignment' scores for professionalisation of community management and support to service providers with the latter focusing on maintenance for repairs. There was also no mention of working with local governments or supporting regulation. The theme of 'harmonisation and alignment was scored as 'limited alignment' to the Triple-S builiding blocks with some alignment with strategy "informed by government WASH plans where present" but overall there seemed to be an inward focus. Monitoring also scored 'limited alignment'; whilst services delivered may be monitored it appeared to be done on an ad hoc basis (when revisiting water points for maintenance and repair) and for a limited time (5 years). The document indicated that LWI followed its own monitoring systems rather than national ones.

WaterAid

The WaterAid document (WaterAid, 2005) outlines WaterAid's strategy for 2005-2010. It scored 'high alignment' with four of the themes: coordination and collaboration, working in long-term partnerships with local organisations, especially NGOs who are their implementing partners, as well as with government; capacity support to local government, recognising the problem of limited local government capacity and aiming to "strengthen local governments' ability to provide equitable and pro-poor water and sanitation services on a larger scale"; learning and adaptive management:

> WaterAid will seek to maximise learning and (…) will develop its information management and communications systems throughout the organisation with partners and communities;

and direct support to service providers, with the appreciation of the need for skills for ongoing operation and the ability to support existing and new projects:

> all projects should achieve long-term benefits, and as such the sustainability of water supplies, the finance and skills required for ongoing operation, and the ability to support existing and new projects are vital.

Although it was scored as 'high alignment' for coordination and collaboration, it was scored as 'unclear alignment' to the theme of harmonisation and alignment as it aimed to influence how others work, including influencing policy, but it was not apparent what effect this had to achieving harmonisation and alignment within the sector or the relation to government policy. Monitoring was also scored as 'limited alignment' as details about what is to be monitored were lacking. Regulation was not mentioned.

Based on the document, communtiy management appears to be the standard approach with emphasis on partner NGOs supporting community projects. As a result, recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options scored 'no alignment' and professionalisation of community management scored 'unclear alignment'.

This document was weakly aligned to the finance-related building blocks with only finance for day-to-day operation being mentioned with no discussion of other ongoing costs or eventual replacement.

Water for People

The Water for People document (Water for People, 2010) outlines the organisation's strategic plan for 2010-2014. It scored 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' for eight themes. It was scored as 'high alignment' for: capacity support to local government, aiming to "develop the systems and local finances so that local governments and communities can keep their own services functioning and extend those services" and change their role from "a direct facilitating role to a mentoring role"; learning and adaptive management, striving to "continually improve, to experiment with promising new ideas" and also to "research effective water resource management and incorporate best practices"; direct support to service providers, providing financial and technical support to water systems as well as "building skills, knowledge, and responsibility"; and for both of the finance-related themes, asset management and financing, to cover all life-cycle costs, supporting communities and governments to plan and finance for capital replacement.

The document showed little evidence of aligning with the themes of harmonisation and alignment, as other organisations are encouraged to follow their ways of working and it was not clear how this affected harmonisation and alignment with government policies (therefore scored as 'unclear alignment'); regulation, which was not included; and recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options, which was scored as 'no alignment' since community management was the focus. Although the private sector may support O&M it is for community-managed systems rather than for delegated management.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF OVERALL RESULTS

Figure 4 shows the summary of 'high alignment' and 'partial alignment' results for this assessment, in the order of most commonly occurring to least.

As shown in Figure 4, the issues most commonly judged to be aligned to the building blocks were learning and adaptive management followed by coordination and collaboration, for which all documents scored either 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment'. This may be a surprising result in the sense that these two issues can be interpreted as being on the 'software' extreme of water service delivery whereas the 'traditional' emphasis on rural water supply has been infrastructure. However, as they both address systemic capacity they could be said to support all the other building blocks. Both learning and coordination enable more effective and efficient working and have been widely acknowledged as important for increasing effectiveness of aid, compared to some of the other building blocks for which new research is supporting their efficacy. In an age where 'value for money' is a high priority for donors (e.g. see DFID, 2011; Bond and Itad, 2012; Jackson, 2012; Jensen, 2012), it is not surprising that looking for ways to improve at relatively low-cost features strongly. However, the extent to which learning and adaptive management and coordination and collaboration are effectively implemented in practice is worth further investigation.

The building blocks with the least alignment found in the documents were: asset management (where only DFID, Water For People and AusAID scored 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment'); monitoring (only EWB Canada and Water for People scored 'partial alignment'); and recognition and promotion of alternative service provider options (for which only Danida received a 'high alignment' scoring). Whilst asset management is increasingly being understood to be an important focus of urban utilities (Burn et al., 2007), it has only recently being seen as important for sustainability in the rural water sector in developing countries. This is an area where additional support and funding are required to strengthen capacity of the sector. Regulation is another weak area which is more commonly addressed in the urban sector in many countries (Trémolet, 2013) but rarely considered in the rural water sector. It may be some time before this building block is reflected in standard approaches, owing to the potential complexity of this issue.

Figure 4. Comparison of theme results – Percentage of documents reviewed scoring 'high alignment' or 'partial alignment' to the Triple-S building blocks.
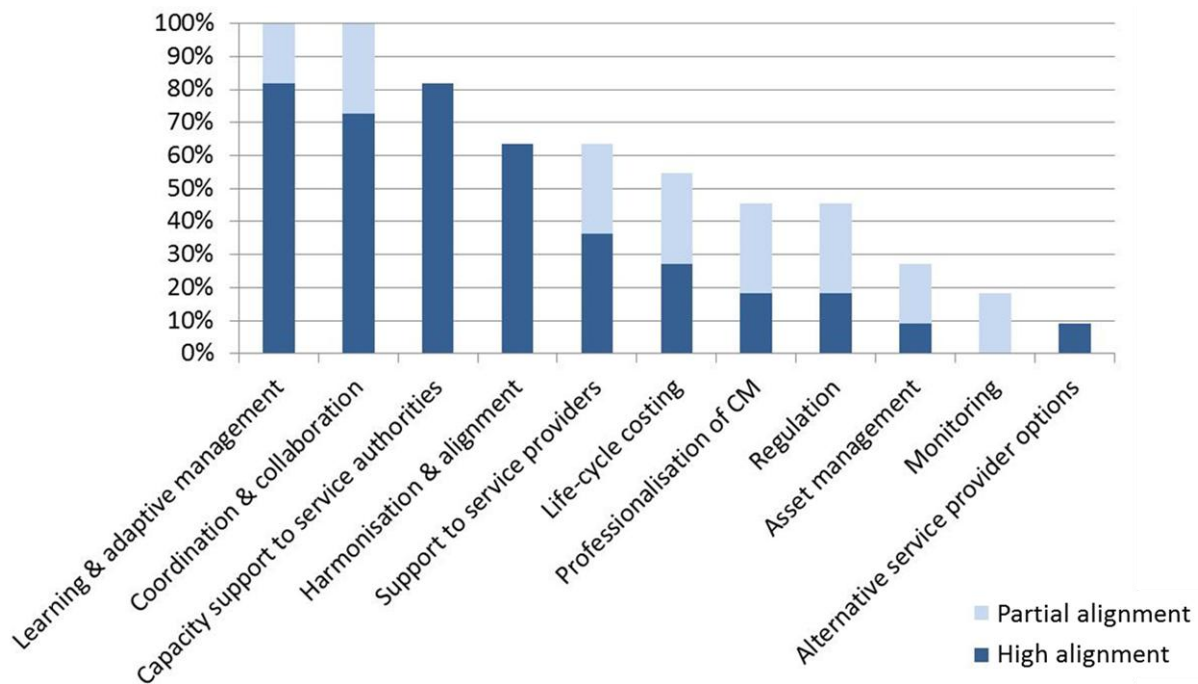
The traditional approach of community management is still seen by many organisations as the only way of providing rural water services. It has been an accepted approach of service delivery in the sector for many years, after the old centralised systems of water supply were seen to be not sustainable and government capacity was generally too limited to improve things (Fonseca and Bolt, 2002). However, it is increasingly being seen that for many situations this approach may not be the best, with self-supply (Sutton, 2009) or delegated management (WSP, 2010) being more appropriate.

The ability to change approach may be limited in the short term since organisations must abide by existing financing mechanisms which may demand a fixed-term project implementation model and related community-based management structure. This problem may be more pronounced for implementing agencies relying on donor funding. Donors therefore need to drive this change in some contexts to enable, and ensure, that their funds are adequately targeted for sustainable water systems. Monitoring systems are believed to need improving, as seen by the weakly aligned scores for the monitoring building block; accountability tends to be commonly based on measuring numbers of people served rather than on quality of service, service providers or sustainability criteria. This actually runs counter to the concept of 'value for money', in that the focus on easy to measure or easy to report indicators can actually risk the sustainability and quality of rural water investments. While transforming existing accountability mechanisms to focus more on the sustainability of water services may require a large shift in the overall way the sector functions and appeals to donors, Triple-S believes that doing so could translate to significant improvements for rural water services.

Financial planning for full life-cycle costs is considered crucial for sustainability; over the lifetime of a system recurrent costs are estimated to be around two to three times more than the original capital expenditure (Fonseca et al., 2011). Even if tariffs are planned to cover O&M costs, other ongoing costs for rural water need to be planned for and covered, whether by taxes, transfers or tariffs. In the documents reviewed, performance in this area was mixed, with some organisations showing high alignment with this building block (DFID, Danida, Water for People) whilst others, noticeably AusAID,

EU, UNICEF and WaterAid received scores of 'limited alignment' or 'no alignment'. Given its critical role in ensuring long-term sustainability (Franceys and Pezon, 2010; Fonseca et al., 2011), more support should be seen for this building block. The low score for 'planning for asset management' is a related point, demonstrating that planning for major capital maintenance and renewals is de-linked from the composition of user tariffs. Until recently the less immediate aspects of life-cycle costs have been commonly ignored (ibid) despite the likelihood that such an approach may lead to broken pumps and pipes which the rural communities cannot afford to replace and consequently leaving communities to rely on ad-hoc donor funding for replacements or return to drinking water from inadequate sources.

It must be stressed that these findings do not necessarily reflect the overall views of the associated organisations towards these issues but they do reflect what has been written, or omitted, in their published policy and strategy documents reviewed as part of this QDA exercise in relation to the Triple-S building blocks. Consequently, care must be taken about assumptions regarding organisational priorities in the rural water sector and the extent to which they are adopting a service delivery approach more broadly.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of policy documents and future studies

The findings presented here give us valuable information about the rural water policies of organisations at that point in time (circa 2008). In addition, Triple-S plans to compare findings from this QDA with an analysis of future (circa 2014) policy documents, to assess changes in (written) policy in the sector.

Whilst particular building blocks have been seen to be aligned to, or not, in these documents, it is acknowledged that there are limitations to written policy documents. As mentioned, written documents comprise only one facet of 'policy', and policy does not directly correspond to action; what happens in practice may differ considerably, either for the better or the worse. Nils Brunsson (2003: 202) highlights that there are often discrepancies between 'talk', 'decisions' and 'actions', but it is "not necessarily the case that what is said is better than what is done". Just because something is not outlined in a written policy does not mean that it is not being practised.

Conversely, just because it is outlined in a policy does not mean it is implemented. In fact, Brunsson discusses instances in which talk and actions can be inversely coupled; in other words, talking about what an organisation will do or its principles can actually decrease the likelihood of corresponding actions. This can be in part due to stakeholders being 'appeased' by the talk, and a lack of follow-up to ascertain whether that 'talk' is translated to action. There could also be a number of barriers to implementing policy, including lack of dissemination or buy-in across large decentralised organisations; lack of knowledge, skills or other difficulties in applying policy in practice; resistance to change; or other factors.

To better understand the linkages and disconnects between policy and practice, the QDA exercise was repeated with so-called 'practice' documents such as requests for proposals, terms of references, project/programme assessments and progress reports. The experiences and lessons learned from this exercise have been discussed in a paper by Wach and Ward (2013).

Further, Triple-S is, at the time of writing, planning to carry out a QDA on governmental rural water policy documents in Ghana and Uganda, where it is currently working on the ground. It is envisioned that this analysis will increase our understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of rural water sector policy in these two countries, with potential scope for increased understanding for the sector overall.

Engagement with and feedback from stakeholders

Given that written documents are only one of many sources of information about policies and practices in the rural water sector, the findings from this and any QDA should be triangulated with other sources

of information, including consultations with individuals which can provide further insights into the policies and practices of various rural water sector organisations.

Inherent in the Triple-S theory of change is close engagement with rural water sector stakeholders (Schouten and Moriarty, 2013), and the organisations selected for inclusion in the QDA are those with which Triple-S has had long-standing 'invocacy' relationships. In addition to this continual engagement, Triple-S specifically reached out to its contacts within the organisations that were included in the QDA to share the findings from this exercise and solicit feedback. To date, the majority[10] of the organisations included in the QDA have engaged positively with the findings, with many indicating that they found the analysis to be valuable. Triple-S very much welcomes further feedback from other individuals who are (or have been) involved with the organisations included in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

This baseline policy QDA supports many of the assumptions that Triple-S holds about the sector, for example that there is insufficient reference to the building block of planning for full life-cycle costs, low recognition and promotion of alternative service providers, insufficient planning for asset management, and that monitoring focuses on access rather than on sustainable service delivery. These building blocks were aligned to least in the analysis.

The QDA also showed that in terms of written policies, the rural water sector supports learning and adaptive management, and coordination and collaboration with these themes receiving the highest alignment scores overall. They may be popular in published policies since they are established practices across different development sectors which are believed to support organisations to improve their effectiveness at relatively low cost.

Given the different remits of the organisations and the documents reviewed, it is imperative to consider the individual analyses for each organisation included, rather than focus exclusively on aggregations and comparisons. That said, the organisations that performed best in reference to our building block framework were DFID, Water for People and AfDB, which represent a bilateral donor agency, NGO and multilateral donor agency, respectively. There is no evidence that a particular type of organisation scores better or worse against the building blocks.

The findings from this QDA, together with feedback from the sector and other methods, can provide a better understanding of the extent to which issues that are considered crucial for sustainability are reflected in policies and practices in the rural water sector. It is also hoped that by publishing these findings other organisations can use the building blocks as a framework for analysis and support development of policies and practices to improve the sustainability of rural water services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[10] One organisation did not react favourably to the exercise, and to date, some organisations have not responded directly to the QDA findings.

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