

The Intricacies of Attracting and Sustaining Investment in WASH in Fragile States

Lessons from Liberia

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July 2015



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Executive Summary

The choice made early in the post-conflict transition by the international community to directly fund WASH service delivery through non-state actors rather than through the Liberian government undermined both sector policy dialogue and the formation of robust government institutions able to lead and orchestrate service delivery by non-state actors.

The lack of a substantive policy dialogue – particularly in the 2003 to 2007 period – meant that a fragmented institutional setup emerged across a number of ministries with no clear locus of policy authority. An earlier move to funding water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) service delivery through country systems (for both urban and rural WASH) – as was done in the health sector – would have been a point of leverage to influence institutional reforms and build a nucleus of capacity in the Government of Liberia (GoL's) institutions responsible for WASH on which future capacity building could have capitalized.

Starting in 2011, the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other development partners provided technical assistance to a multi-stakeholder sector planning process that has played a key role in addressing this early mistake transitioning the sector from one dominated by a humanitarian response approach, to one that is based on a longer-term development approach. This TA has helped build a detailed picture of service delivery and generated clear priorities for capital investments reflected in the Liberia WASH Sector Investment Plan (SIP). The SIP and TA to improve the operational efficiency of sector institutions, specifically the main utility, has mobilized an additional US\$30m in investments for WASH in Liberia.

The SIP provided direction to existing sector allocations and has also been a strategic tool that has influenced increased bilateral and multilateral aid into the country following the Ebola virus outbreak, including spurring the World Bank's re-engagement in Liberia's WASH sector. These aid flows should seek to better connect policy dialogue within individual sectors to higher-level dialogue on state-building. This will help to resolve bottlenecks beyond WASH specific institutions – such as on decentralization – that have potential to enhance the reach and rate of service delivery. It will also reinforce mutual accountability among domestic and donor sector actors driving up investment levels to those needed for universal access.

This paper aims to inform this new wave of support to Liberia's WASH sector by looking back at service provision in the country over the period 2003 to 2015 and reflecting on the transition from the post-war emergency response to the nascent development response. The paper first describes key trade-offs encountered by the international community in this transition, describing choices made in Liberia that held back government capacity to orchestrate a national response to service delivery. It then goes on to describe how WSP and other development partners have, since 2011, worked with the government of Liberia to build and attract investment to a country-led WASH development program. The paper presents lessons for sector practitioners operating in post-crisis transition situations – both those in developing country governments and their development partners.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
DDRR	Demobilize, disarm, rehabilitate and reintegrate
DfID	United Kingdom's Department for International Development
DGIS	Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
GoL	Government of Liberia
GPOBA	Global Partnership of Output-Based Aid
GPS	Global Positioning System
FY	Financial Year
IDA	International Development Association
JSR	Joint Sector Review
LWSC	Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MTEF	Medium Term Budget Framework
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MPW	Ministry of Public Works
MWSSRP	Monrovia Water Supply and Sanitation Rehabilitation Project
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NWSHPC	National Water Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Committee
NOCAL	National Oil Company of Liberia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PBA	Program-Based Approach
SIP	Sector Investment Plan
SSP	Sector Strategic Plan
SPR	Sector Performance Report
SWAp	Sector-wide Approach to Planning
TA	Technical Assistance
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WSP	Water and Sanitation Program - Africa of the World Bank
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. Introduction

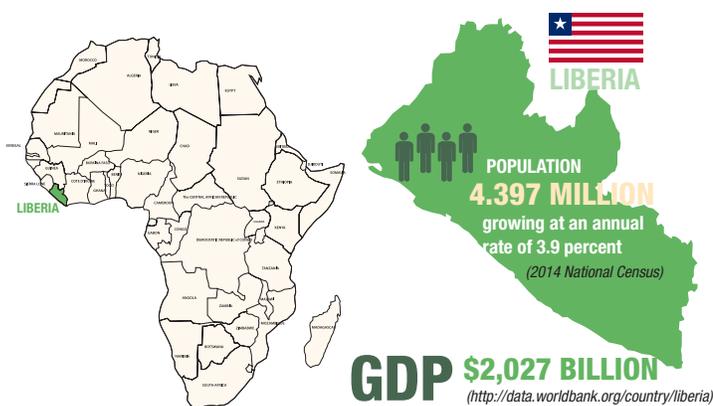
Development aid to Liberia has been extraordinarily high, yet little has been allocated to the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector. At its peak in 2010, Liberia received US\$358 per capita in aid flows, higher than any other country in Africa and one of the highest levels in the world. Yet in the decade to 2011 aid allocated for WASH averaged just over US\$2 per capita (OECD 2015).

Domestic allocations to the WASH sector were also low, estimated at only US\$2.5m or 0.4 percent of the national budget in 2013-14 (Government of Liberia 2014). Altogether, domestic and external funding for WASH in Liberia has averaged between US\$25 to 30m annually over the past three years, falling far short of the estimated US\$120m needed per year to reach national or Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets (Government of Liberia 2013, 12).

Liberia's WASH sector faces real and complex structural problems rooted in the post-conflict emergency response. For many years after the war, the WASH sector remained highly fragmented and lacked cohesive planning, with ineffective government institutions remaining on the sidelines. Non-state actors provided emergency relief, but lacked the overview and reach to deliver services equitably across the country, or to put in place management systems and processes to sustain interventions effectively.

The dearth of investment in the country's WASH sector has been accompanied by and has contributed to a deep-seated lack of absorption capacity. The absence of government institutions capable of systematic sector planning, coordination and capacity to implement WASH improvements is a real barrier to the possibility of channeling sector investment through country systems.

The persistence of this critical bottleneck can be traced to a post-war "capacity conundrum". The wartime destruction of infrastructure and institutional capacity, combined with the urgent need to react post-conflict, discouraged donors and Liberia's own finance ministry from investing in run-down state institutions in favor of working through alternative systems. Yet, bypassing state institutions has kept these in a diminished state and thus limited the sector's capacity to absorb finance and turn it into services – so inhibiting investment. This conundrum was further entrenched as government attention in post-war Liberia was focused on the countless pressing challenges, many of which were given greater political priority (such as road building, electricity, health) or simply seen by government as not needing attention as they were being dealt with by non-state actors.



US\$25M - US\$30M

Average annual domestic and external funding for WASH in Liberia over the past three years.

US\$120M

Estimated amount needed per year to reach national or Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets

Over the past four years WSP has focused its technical assistance and advisory support to work with government, donors and civil society actors in Liberia to overcome this capacity-conundrum and attract additional investment flows to the WASH sector. The primary strategy has been to strengthen country systems and institutions and to draw them back into overseeing and delivering WASH services. WSP has also played an active part in a multi-stakeholder national planning and review processes with the broad aim of helping the government orchestrate the sector by defining national priorities and investment projects more clearly.

Specific activities have included: i) generating a picture of service delivery in the sector through high quality but difficult-to-collect data; ii) structuring this data into projects in a sector investment plan (SIP); iii) playing an active role in a multi-stakeholder planning and review process; and, iv) providing hands-on TA preparing institutions for investment.

This work has contributed to transitioning the sector from its externally driven emergency phase to an increasingly country-led development approach, helping mobilize at least an additional US\$ 30m in investments to the Liberian WASH sector.



II. Liberia's Post-war WASH Situation: Anatomy of a Broken Sector

Liberia's post-war capacity conundrum had long trapped the WASH sector in a low-capacity, low-funding equilibrium, and as a result, large sections of the population have remained dangerously exposed to unsafe water and sanitary conditions. Access to improved sanitation was below 20 percent in the early 2000s and WASH-related diseases such as diarrhea were common. Cholera, in particular, remains endemic. Liberia experienced an outbreak of over 34,000 cases in 2003 and has consistently reported over 1,000 cases a year up to 2011 (WHO 2012). More recently, unsafe WASH services and the lack of proper hygiene practices contributed "to the propagation of the Ebola virus", and was even listed as a "critical factor" in the context of hand-washing in schools (United Nations / World Bank / EU / AfDB 2015).

While access to improved water sources has been reported as high as 61% nationally in the early 2000s and up to 75 percent in 2012 (WHO/UNICEF 2014), these figures are misleadingly optimistic as many "improved" sources are demonstrably unsafe. In the capital Monrovia, the majority of the population relies on point sources such as hand-dug wells, with less than 15 percent having access to piped water. A WSP-financed water quality study found the majority of Monrovia's protected point sources to be heavily contaminated with coliform bacteria and nitrates and so unsafe for drinking (UHL & Associates 2011). Outside Monrovia, most cities have no piped supply at all. Even in 2012, over 20 percent of the rural population still resorted to surface water as their main source of drinking water. Tests on small sets of water samples from rural point sources indicate that up to 40 percent of water points in rural counties such as Sinoe are also unsafe for drinking. The lack of sufficient sector investment in the first post-

war decade is closely linked to the weakness of national sector institutions. In rural areas, the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) – a large institution primarily devoted to construction of roads and buildings – hosted a division mandated to manage rural water, sanitation and hygiene programs. However, MPW has struggled with chronic technical and financial capacity gaps, operating with personnel that have only basic levels of education supported with an annual budget below US\$100,000 in past years, according to a 2014 Sector Performance Report. A sector capacity development plan completed in 2012 indicated that MPW staff lack training, equipment and funds for core duties including pump maintenance, monitoring the functionality of water points, or development of infrastructure (Government of Liberia 2014).

In urban areas, the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation (LWSC) is responsible for the provision of water and sanitation services, with a stated vision to ensure "safe drinking water throughout Liberia" and to "meet the water needs of all [urban] residents" (LWSC 2015). However, it has yet to demonstrate the capacity to meet this ambitious goal in the post-war period. As late as 2012, an institutional audit called LWSC "an organization in crises [sic]", "financially insolvent", "unable to meet basic service deliverables [...] with most of its infrastructure left inoperable or in poor condition", an organization in "firefighting mode with almost all of its limited capacity dedicated to dealing with daily emergencies" (GBSI / Government of Liberia 2012).

15% of households in Monrovia have access to piped water, while the majority rely on point sources such as hand-dug wells.

II. From Emergency Response towards Country-led Development

WSP's engagement in 2010 came on the back of significant progress in delivering basic water and sanitation services under the international emergency response following the end of the civil war. During the initial humanitarian support phase after the 2003 peace agreement, a host of non-state actors mobilized a nationwide response that increased the number of improved public water points built annually from around 100 in 2003 to 300 in 2004 and to a peak of 1,435 in 2007 (World Bank 2011). Over 45 percent of these points were built by UN agencies and international NGOs, approximately a third by smaller NGOs, local churches, communities, companies and private individuals, and 4 percent by the Government of Liberia (GoL) (World Bank 2011). The government was still a transitional one and had little involvement in either directing or implementing service delivery. These predominantly non-state efforts were the driving force for raising access to protected water sources by 14 percent between 2000 and 2012 (WHO/UNICEF 2014).

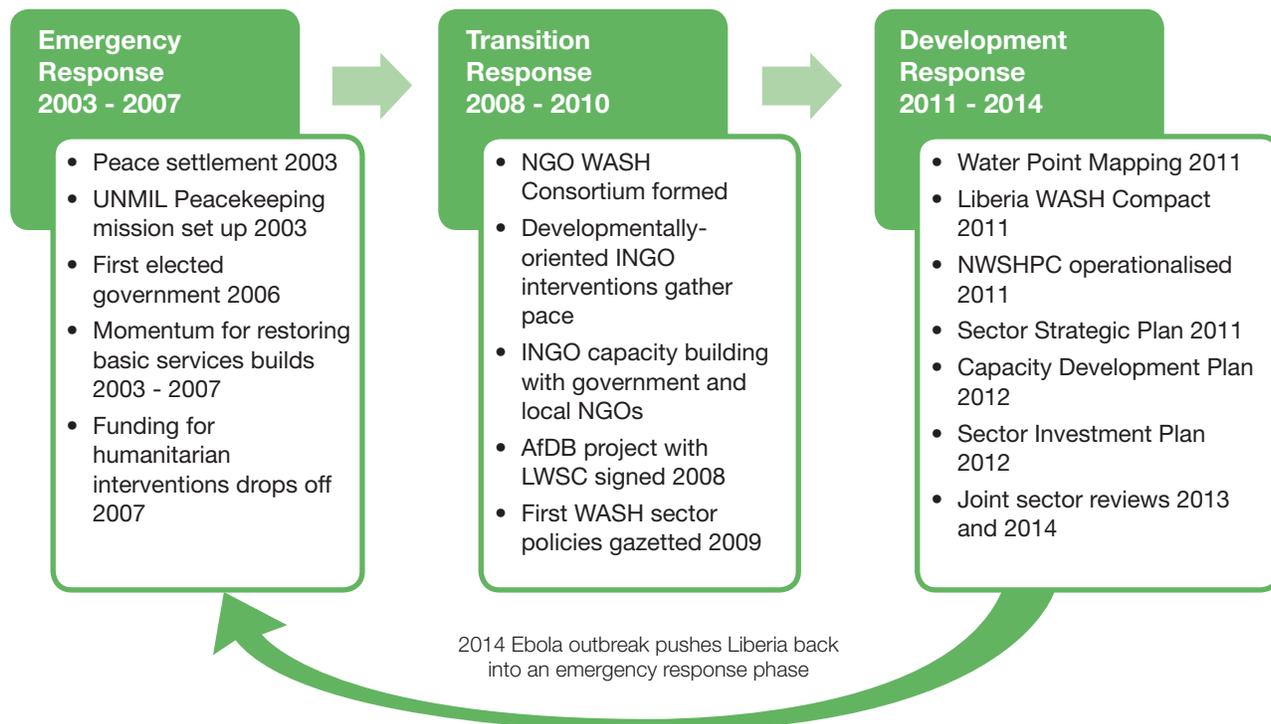
The focus in the early years was on meeting the short-term needs of people following the war. However, these initiatives did not provide a working service delivery model that could be sustainably scaled up to achieve the national targets of universal coverage by 2030. Projects focused on quick impact and did not seek to establish longer-term goals of cost recovery. Similarly, sanitation interventions focused on building simple pit latrines but did not promote hygiene. As a result, up to a quarter of water points failed within the first year, with barely half still fully functional after five years due to poor management practices and a lack of supply chains for spare-parts (World Bank 2011).

In urban areas, where at least half of Liberia's population is concentrated, the hand-pump driven model of service delivery deployed in the first few years of the post-conflict period has simply been inadequate both in technology and scale. As the 2011 Uhl water quality study showed, hand-pumps, whether shallow or deep, appear unsuitable

in Liberia's dense urban environments, especially given the absence of proper sewer systems, fecal sludge management systems or any organized system of chlorination. Yet, even the larger UN agencies and NGOs were unwilling to build the desperately needed piped water and sanitation infrastructure in urban areas and develop the related capacity. At the same time, the national utility was in crisis, lacking any significant investments to restore its infrastructure or capacity.

This "capacity conundrum", that is, the undermining of local systems through the use of parallel emergency systems, is neither unique to the WASH sector nor to Liberia. After crises and in the absence of an effective government, a common *modus operandi* is that non-state actors (particularly NGOs and UN agencies) step in to provide urgent humanitarian relief and, in extreme cases such as Liberia, effectively manage the country. This type of engagement involves the deployment of peacekeeping forces, setting up a national transitional government, initiating DDDR programs (demobilize, disarm, rehabilitate and reintegrate) and restoring basic services. The UN presence, vital in the early stages of transition to prevent conflict, promote stability and meet basic needs, soon faced difficult trade-offs in balancing quick wins and confidence-building measures with institution and state building measures. Getting this balance right makes the difference between leaving states without the capacity to direct or deliver basic services *versus* building a core state capacity that is able to orchestrate non-state actors and to progressively replace humanitarian-oriented with development-oriented service delivery capacity as the transition to development progresses. Where non-state actors continue to dominate service delivery after the humanitarian response period – in the case of Liberia around four years after 2003 – the state's role will remain weak, preventing the opportunity to foster a virtuous cycle of country-led service delivery that builds the citizens' confidence in state institutions.

TIMELINE AND KEY EVENTS IN LIBERIA'S TRANSITION FROM EMERGENCY TO DEVELOPMENT



These emergency response dynamics started to change after 2007, when UN and INGOs engaged with the first elected post-war government that assumed power in 2006. As Liberia’s Water and Sanitation Policy described it:

“From the end of the war to end of the Interim Government, [efforts] concentrated on humanitarian issues. With the coming of the present Government at the beginning of 2006, the focus has moved to include the rehabilitation and upgrading of water supply and sanitation infrastructure in order to restore them to the pre-war condition and improve them where possible” (Government of Liberia 2009)

The return of an elected government with a longer-term focus was matched by increasing coordination among non-state actors. The Liberia WASH Consortium, for example, brought together the main NGOs active in the sector. In the urban sector, LWSC benefited from its first significant external investment in 2008, the *Monrovia Water Supply and*

Sanitation Rehabilitation Project (MWSSRP) a US\$23m investment from the African Development Bank (AfDB). Despite these positive developments, however, the transition towards long-term planning and at-scale investments continued to be extremely slow.

At LWSC, the MWSSRP investments were hampered by low absorption capacity, and two years after its original closing date in 2010, disbursements stood at only 55 percent (AfDB 2012). The MWSSRP project restored LWSC’s production capacity to approximately 15 percent of its pre-war level (Government of Liberia 2013, 58) and managed to rehabilitate about 25 percent of LWSC’s 200-kilometer network (AfDB 2012). Though important, the progress made did not match the need. In 2013, water losses in the existing network were still at 80 percent of production volumes and it has been estimated that to supply the unserved population of the capital, up to 6,000 kilometers of piped network would be necessary (World Bank 2014, 23). Operational inefficiencies revealed by the 2012 audit meant that to the extent that infrastructure was restored; LWSC was still not in a position to provide regular services or to cover its costs.

In the rural WASH sub-sector, nascent government institutions were not able to replace decreasing external investments in rural areas, reflected in the declining rate of water points constructed after 2007 (World Bank 2011). Government institutions responsible for rural WASH sector remained fragmented with responsibilities split between the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy (MoLME), the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the MPW. None of these ministries or the NGO WASH Consortium

had reliable data on rural WASH infrastructure, and no systematic planning to define priority interventions and attract investment had been carried out. An advocacy paper written by the Liberia NGO WASH Consortium at the time highlighted two critical bottlenecks: the slow progress made in operationalizing policies to address the ineffective, fragmented sector structure, and the lack of a comprehensive nationwide assessment of WASH facilities, a precondition for improved planning.



IV. Generating a Detailed Picture of Need as an Input to National Planning

WSP responded to the government’s call for support during Africa Water Week in 2010 by embarking on an ambitious nationwide water point infrastructure mapping exercise to create a reliable baseline for the sector. Working with the MPW and UNICEF, WSP deployed innovative technology (see Box 1) to survey all protected water points in the country within a six-month period – over 10,000 in total – in the rural and urban areas of Liberia. This survey established the first post-war baseline of point-source water infrastructure in the country, providing a vital evidence base for systematic planning.

The water point mapping exercise had also mapped improved water points in Monrovia, including protected hand-dug wells, drilled wells with hand pumps, kiosks supplied by tanker trunks, and LWSC standpipes. Monrovia was predominately served by hand-pumps with less than five percent of households being covered directly by LWSC’s piped network. Building on this point-source

data and seeing that the epicenter of previous cholera outbreaks had been in Monrovia, WSP commissioned a specific investigation into the quality of water sources in the capital city.

Twenty percent of the water points in this inventory were randomly selected for sampling, with selection stratified to ensure representation from areas of the city prone to cholera outbreaks. Water samples included 204 public water points that included protected hand dug wells fitted with hand-pumps (71%), unprotected hand dug wells (10%), boreholes with hand-pumps (9%), kiosk sources that were supplied by the LWSC distribution network (6%), and taps or below ground reservoir vaults also supplied by the LWSC piped distribution network (4%).

The results pointed to a high level of fecal contamination in most of Monrovia’s formal and informal water supply (See figure 3 and 4). The investigation revealed that 57 percent

FIGURE 1: “CORRIDOR OF NEED” CONTAINING 75% OF LIBERIANS WITHOUT ADEQUATE ACCESS TO SAFE WATER

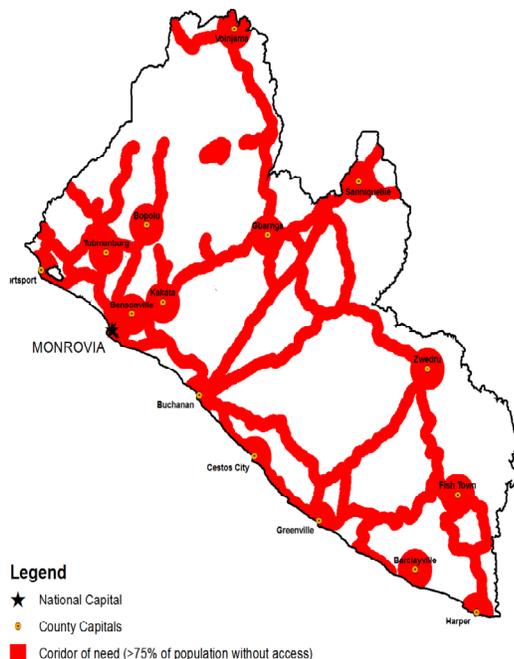


FIGURE 2: PERSONS WITHOUT ADEQUATE ACCESS TO SAFE WATER IN SHADES OF RED (GREEN REPRESENTS ADEQUATE ACCESS, GREY AREAS WITHOUT POPULATION)

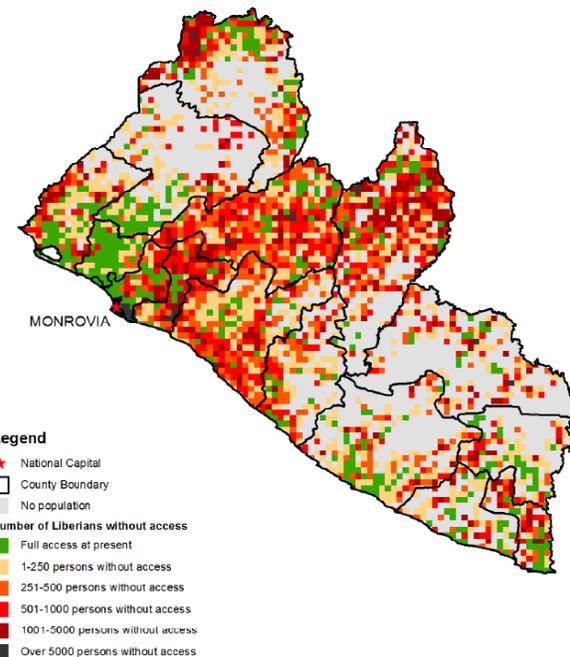


FIGURE 3: MAP SHOWING THE STUDY AREA AND LOCATIONS AT WHICH WATER SAMPLES WERE COLLECTED IN MONROVIA

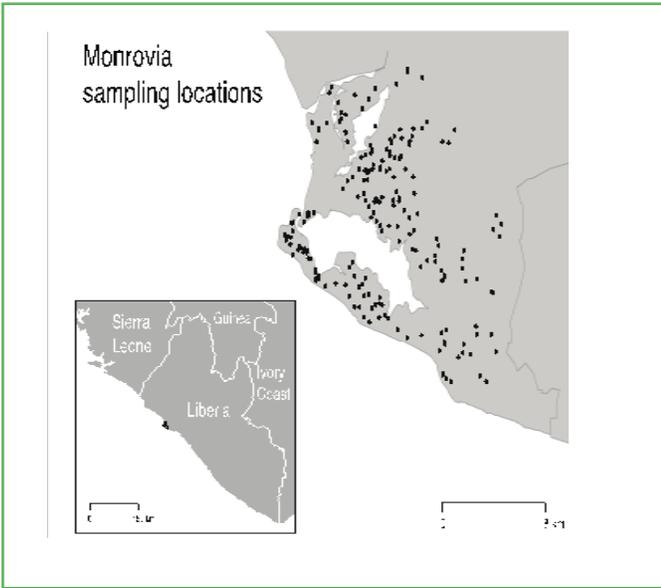
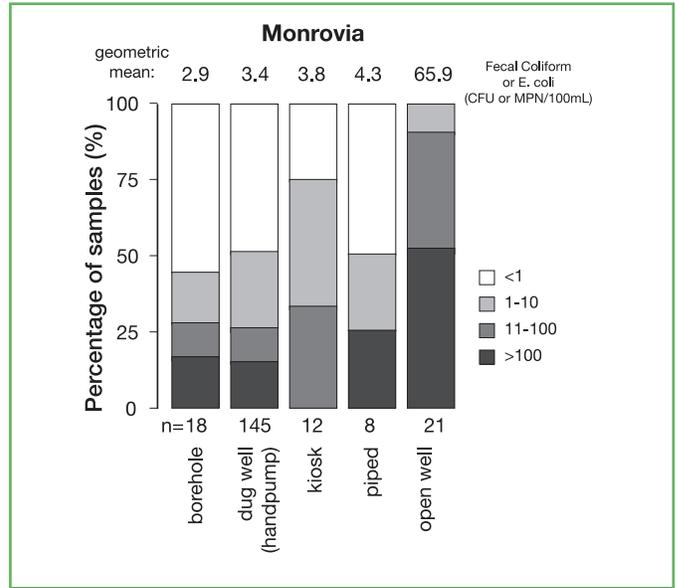


FIGURE 4: FECAL CONTAMINATION IN MONROVIA BY SOURCE TYPE



of the samples had extremely high levels of E. coli while 22 percent had nitrate concentrations that exceeded Liberia’s own standards. (Kumpel Forthcoming)

Building a detailed picture of sector service delivery generated clear messages on what needed to be done in the sector, both in the rural and urban context. In the rural context, the water point mapping identified that there was a clear need to better match available capacity (state and non-state) with needs in poorly served areas – especially in the corridors of relatively high population density. In the urban context, the water quality monitoring pointed to the need to move away from hand-pumps in urban areas and stabilize LWSC’s operations so that better quality piped water could be delivered in urban areas.

However, in both cases the GoL’s institutions responsible for WASH struggled to act on this planning data without further technical assistance. In the case of rural water supply, the MPW did initiate a system to coordinate and capture new water points being built or rehabilitated by non-state actors but failed to enforce it or make the new data available regularly. However, there was some voluntary re-prioritization by non-state actors responding the water

point atlas that was published based on the data. A number of development partners, including UNICEF, explicitly incorporated the data into project designs to improve the targeting of investment. But the greater opportunity to use this data as the basis for a results-based financing initiative was not taken up by GoL or its development partners.

Similarly, the results of the water quality data had greater impact on the strategy of non-state actors than it did within the GoL. The data was a key factor in WSP’s decision to start working with the LWSC to stabilize its operations and to support the LWSC’s bid for capital budget in 2013 (see section 7).

A less direct but important result was that a local consultant involved in the water point mapping and water quality surveys transitioned to the MPW and started publishing the data along with other key sector documents, such as the water policy, online. Working with a dynamic Assistant Minister, the two became a focal point in the GoL for the dialogue on WASH, an important step in initiating the multi-stakeholder planning and review process described in next section.

BOX 1: PIONEERING NEW DATA COLLECTION TECHNOLOGIES DURING THE LIBERIAN WATERPOINT INFRASTRUCTURE SURVEY

During the 2010-11 Waterpoint Infrastructure Survey in Liberia, WSP was one of the first agencies worldwide to successfully use smartphone based mobile-to-web data collection applications at national scale. WSP has since advised on one particular application (FLOW), and has used this and similar applications (Fulcrum, DoForms) at scale both in Liberia and subsequently in Sierra Leone, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These applications have helped provide proof-of-concept for a new best-practice in large-scale survey data collection.

Relying on smartphones equipped with touchscreen, camera and GPS, which have become available for less than US\$100 in the past five years, this new best practice in field surveying offers at least four advantages over traditional pen and paper methods: time and financial savings, greater ease of use, improved data safety and accuracy, and better management control.

Financial savings can be substantial. The primary source of financial savings from mobile-to-web surveying is the reduction in surveying time and the abolishment of manual transcription of data from paper forms to computers. In the Liberia and Sierra Leone projects, it is estimated that eliminating post-survey transcription alone saved up to 5.7 percent of project costs and over 600 workdays, more than offsetting hard- and software costs.

Cost-savings are closely related to data safety: loss or spoilage of questionnaires can cause enormous re-surveying costs. Mobile-to-web data collection apps minimize this risk by allowing regular back-up to an online dashboard. This is a major advantage not only over pen and paper, but previous “PDA” devices without network connection. Regular data uploads from the field can also be a critical advantage if rapid availability of data is required in emergencies such as the recent Ebola epidemic. A further benefit of uploading data regularly is that it enables near-real-time tracking of the performance of surveyors by survey management.

Data accuracy can also increase by using mobile-to-web surveying, not just due to the elimination of transcription errors, but due to the automatic recording of GPS coordinates, the ability to photograph or scan certain complex items instead of capturing them by typing (or example. bill numbers during the customer enumeration), and because mandatory fields can prevent accidental incomplete questionnaire submissions.

As WSP’s work in Liberia has shown, such off-the-shelf apps are viable, indeed, highly advantageous even in the complex environment of fragile states. The many advantages of smartphone-based surveying apps – from significant cost savings, to more accurate data, greater ease of use, better data safety and more accurate, real-time project monitoring – constitute a real step forward in survey administration.

V. Facilitating a multi-stakeholder planning and review process

As the data became available, the government of Liberia increased its effort to assume sector leadership. A WASH Compact in 2011 was a critical turning point. Signed by the President of Liberia, it committed the government to strengthen institutional capacity, reinforce efforts to provide equitable services, support sector monitoring and improve sector-financing mechanisms. The WASH Compact created a new National Water Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Committee (NWSHPC), a multi-stakeholder body led by the MPW that provided a locus of authority and coordination for rural WASH for the first time. The NWSHPC developed a Sector Strategic Plan (SSP) a roadmap in-line with the four commitments in the WASH compact (see box 2) though did not specify the infrastructure investments required in the sector.

To realize the WASH Compact's commitment to improved service delivery and to provide a mechanism to lobby for, review and update both the SSP and the SIP, WSP and UNICEF supported the government ministries and agencies involved in the sector to hold the first Liberian Joint Sector Reviews (JSR) in 2013 and 2014 (see box 3). While the first JSR in 2013 was mainly an information sharing exercise, inputs from a senior Ugandan water sector official, brought in as an observer, convinced the government of the need to prepare a Sector Performance Report (SPR) prior to the 2014 JSR a proposal then supported by WSP.

In 2014, the Government of Liberia published the country's first Sector Performance Report on WASH. This report brought key information for decision-making to the second WASH Joint Sector Review in May 2014. The SPR collated information from surveys, studies and reports for stakeholders to use as an evidence base to debate and agree priorities for action.

The report was written by a team of Liberian authors identified from the key WASH ministries and agencies. The support team helped find and repackage data from the Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and supported a robust process of peer review, discussion and

BOX 2: REFLECTIONS ON THE 2011 LIBERIA WASH COMPACT

The development of the Liberia WASH Compact was the result of a Joint Mission undertaken with the support of the Government of Liberia and the Sanitation and Water for All initiative. This was the first time sector representatives from nearly all agencies (bi-lateral, multi-lateral and civil society) working in the Liberian WASH sector came together under the leadership of government (led by the Ministry of Planning). At the time many sector representatives managing investments in Liberia were based in other countries and so had not met before.

The compact was a very simple document that outlined commitments to the WASH sector arranged around four key thematic areas, for delivery over a two-year time period, to:

- Strengthen Institutional Capacity
- Ensure Equity, Prioritize Service Provision
- Develop a Monitoring System
- Improve Sector Financing Mechanisms

Based on reviews of the Compact, the most significant result has been the improved coordination and networking across the WASH sector in Liberia. Regular meetings of the sector coordination committee (the NWSHPC) provided a forum for information sharing and a focus for sector discussions. The four commitments of the 2011 Compact formed the structure of the Sector Strategic Plan (SSP) and the WASH section of the second Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS II, 2012-17). The SSP set out a detailed roadmap of actions for sector actors and the four pillars above have provided a focus for the work of the sector as well as for joint sector reviews (JSRs).

BOX 3: JOINT SECTOR REVIEWS: A MECHANISM TO PROMOTE SECTOR LEARNING AND TRANSITION TO COUNTRY-LED DEVELOPMENT

Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs) are an established mechanism for prioritization of sector action in many developing countries and across a number of sectors including health, education, agriculture, energy and water. They are generally designed to jointly review (donors, government and civil society) the implementation of sector plans or to assess sector performance and to agree on actions to address constraints in implementation or to improve performance on a half-yearly, annual or biennial basis.

JSRs were established in the early 1990s as part of implementing sector-wide approaches (SWAp) a term used in development circles but closely linked to Program-Based Approaches (PBAs), part of an OECD-wide move towards monitoring sector outcomes rather than inputs or outputs. Though the JSR has its origins as a review mechanism within the SWAp, today they are carried out in contexts without a formal SWAp.

Though little research has been done on the impact of JSRs in the WASH sector, JSRs have been in use in the health and education sectors for over 20 years and were experience1points valuable for alignment of partners with the sector policy, strategic plan and budget. They are important fora for sharing information, discussing strategies, policy dialogue with a wider audience and with a comprehensive view on the sector as a whole. JSRs have a potential to improve plans, mobilize additional resources and promote mutual accountability.

Persistent challenges reported in the health and education sectors include:

- The timely availability of good quality data as well as national capacity to perform strategic analysis.
- How to ensure that relevant JSR recommendations are integrated in decentralized plans.
- How to balance between a drive for more participation and good technical and policy discussions.
- How to ensure meaningful participation and further develop mutual accountability in the context of a growing tendency among donors to ask for a direct attribution of results.
- How best to integrate meaningful aid and development effectiveness criteria in monitoring performance.
- How to get tackle institutional and systemic issues.

Sources used include (IHP+ 2013) and (Holvoet 2009)

refinement. Over two hundred attendees spent the two days reviewing the Sector Performance Report, listening to each other's points of views and deciding on the best way forward for the sector by prioritizing actions. The event set a high precedent for the next Joint Sector Review, which should be held following the end of the 2015 fiscal year. It will be important to identify a local coordinating team, and any necessary external support, to take a lead role in again preparing an updated SPR. At least six months should be allocated for this task, which should also include more inputs from the county level.

The multi-stakeholder planning and review process has improved sector coordination including greater circulation of information among actors and has created a focus for annual reporting on the activities in the Sector Strategic Plan. However, key institutional changes such as setting up the Water Supply and Sanitation Commission and a National Water Resources and Sanitation Board have been slow, undermining momentum on other equally important steps such as consolidating sector monitoring and attracting sector investment which were to be done by these institutions (Government of Liberia 2012). Furthermore, more support will be required to help the government maximize the SPR

and the JSRs and to use them as a means to assess sector performance. Data on the relation between inputs and outputs in the sector is still far too fragmented to enable a quantitative analysis of sector performance.

The principle of mutual accountability, in turn, is not well understood among actors – both by the GoL’s water sector institutions and by development partners in the water sector. The persistence of highly contractual norms of humanitarian aid in Liberia instead of the more collaborative norms of

development assistance in low-income politically stable countries is likely one of main reasons for this. There are also no internal or external oversight mechanisms to hold the GoL and partners in the sector accountable to specific commitments. The ministries of finance, planning or the President’s Office, for example, currently play a very limited role in the multi-stakeholder planning and review process. Similarly, there are no obvious external budget support or peace and state-building goal processes that could be used as accountability mechanisms.



VI. Informing the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue by Translating Sector Data into Detailed Investment Plans

WSP supported a sector investment plan (SIP) to deepen stakeholders' understanding of the specific infrastructure investments required to make progress in the sector.

The SIP was a strategic initiative that translated the high-level targets set out in the Government's "Agenda for Transformation" and SSP respectively into discrete WASH investment projects, estimating associated costs and time-scales required to improved coverage across urban and rural Liberia. Published by the MPW, the SIP defined priority projects for WASH both urban and rural areas, providing the government with a credible plan and well-defined needs to approach investors both domestic and donor.

The SIP and associated dissemination activities have helped mobilize at least US\$30 million in additional funding commitments for the Liberian WASH sector since 2013 and has played a vital role in the re-engagement of the World Bank as an active funder of the Liberian WASH sector. In May 2015, the World Bank initiated a dialogue with the

Government of Liberia to prioritize the preparation of a US\$ 10 million investment in water supply and sanitation that is derived from the SIP. When effective, this will constitute the first stand-alone investment project in the WASH sector by the World Bank in post-war Liberia and is a step in the transition to country-led development as the project will be executed by LWSC, providing opportunity for building implementation capacity through learning-by-doing.

WSP has also used the SIP to inform its work with the World Bank's Global Partnership of Output-Based Aid to develop a project to connect up to 8,000 additional households in poorer neighborhoods at a cost of approximately US\$5 million. A GPOBA funded scoping study was successfully completed in late 2014, though the project will likely be conditional on both the World Bank infrastructure investment and a continued improved performance of LWSC (see next section).

TABLE 1: ADDITIONAL FUNDING MOBILIZED BY THE SECTOR INVESTMENT PLAN

Donor	Implementer	Project	Amount	Status
World Bank/ IDA	LWSC	Urban Water and Sanitation Infrastructure	US\$10m	Allocated, project initiation pending
World Bank/ GPOBA	LWSC	Pro-poor Connection Subsidies	US\$5m	Feasibility study completed, project initiation pending
DfID	UNICEF/MPW	Rural WASH Project – Eastern Liberia	US\$6.5m (£4.75m)	Under implementation
DfID	MPW / Liberia WASH Consortium	Sustainable WASH in Fragile Contexts	US\$12.5m (£4.5m)	Not disbursed due delays caused by Ebola Epidemic
DGIS	UNICEF	Accelerating Sanitation and Water for All in Liberia	US\$4m	Under implementation
Firestone	LWSC	Water and Sanitation System in Harbel	tba	Feasibility study ongoing
NOCAL	LWSC	Water and Sanitation System in Ganta	tba	Feasibility study ongoing

In addition to the US\$10m in IDA and potential GPOBA funding, the SIP has also played a key role in the mobilization of the rural WASH project in Eastern Liberia implemented by UNICEF in conjunction with MPW, financed by the United Kingdom's DfID at cost of US\$7 million, as well as the renewal of funding for the Liberia WASH Consortium by DfID at a volume of US\$12.5m (though this could not be disbursed during the funding window due to the Ebola outbreak). The Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) funded an SIP related project through UNICEF at a volume of US\$ 4m. In the aftermath of the Ebola epidemic, two private actors – the Firestone Company and the National Oil Company of Liberia committed to

investments in SIP priority projects in the secondary cities of Harbel and Ganta, however, the investment amount is yet to be determined subject to ongoing feasibility studies.

While significant, these investment figures still fall short of the US\$120 million a year needed to reach the MDGs.¹ Even though the SIP packaged sector data into specific investment projects, it initially struggled to attract additional funding from outside the sector and country. However, increased aid flows into the country following the Ebola virus outbreak have been influenced by the SIP, which was used to program the new funds.

¹ The SIP was launched by the Vice President of Liberia, the US Ambassador, the World Bank and the African Development Bank at the 2013 JSR, was disseminated both in hard and electronic versions.

VII. Breaking the Capacity Conundrum with Hands-on Technical Assistance

WSP remained conscious of the Liberian capacity conundrum during its support to national data collection, investment planning and monitoring.

While the Government of Liberia had taken important steps toward assuming sector leadership, new commitments to investment remained well below the sector requirements set out in the SIP. One reason for this was a critical lack of capacity and credibility within the domestic institutions to successfully implement investments.

With this in mind WSP, and other partners, have provided hands-on TA both to sector ministries and agencies to raise their respective credibility in both planning and as implementing agencies worthy of investment.

In 2013 WASH related line ministries requested TA for the preparation of their annual budget request in a format that conformed to the Medium Term Budget Framework (MTEF). Capital funding from the national budget for WASH had been negligible until 2013. WSP's TA supported the ministries and agencies to prepare their budget requests in the MTEF format and primed staff to defend requests at the MoF's budget hearings. The TA led to increased budget allocations to WASH from US\$1m to US\$3.5m. However, actual expenditures were only US\$2.5m due to slow disbursement and a lack of absorption capacity, particularly at the MPW. Furthermore, much of this funding was channeled into subsidizing running costs of LWSC (LWSC 2014).

WSP's second line of action has been to initiate work with development partners (initially USAID) to assess and strengthen MPW's systems of financial management and procurement with a view to channeling investments for WASH through country-systems. This is in line with Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action, and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, which followed the signing of a government-to-government (G2G) Fixed Amount Reimbursement Agreement (FARA) with the MOHSW and MOF.

WSP is also providing TA support to help break the capacity conundrum within the utility. LWSC put in place new, proactive management that has actively pursued improvements in cost-recovery with WSP's support. The focus on cost recovery is critically important given the scale of the subsidies from the government and to ensure service sustainability. Cost recovery, in turn, could only be achieved through strengthening the utility's financial and technical capacity, including customer management, metering and billing systems, network maintenance and loss-reduction. Over the past three years, USAID and WSP have supported LWSC to update its customer database and locate and enumerate thousands of their own customers, along with thousands of suspected illegal connections, triggering a clampdown on unregistered and non-paying users. WSP analyzed and precipitated an upgrading of LWSC's billing system, as well as piloting improved metering- and customer acquisition processes.

The progress made is reflected in clearly positive cost-recovery trends. At LWSC, revenues from bill collections increased from just under US\$ 2m in fiscal year 2011 (FY11), to US\$2.5m in FY13 and US\$ 4.7m in FY14 (Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation 2014). Though a tariff increase at the start of FY14 played a 30 to 50 percent role in the improved revenue performance the remaining has been gleaned from internal efficiencies (see separate field note on cost recovery).

Along with the clear identification of priority projects in the Sector Investment Plan, evidence of this progress in LWSC's operational efficiency has been catalytic in sparking a dialogue between the World Bank and the GoL on a potential new US\$10m IDA investment in LWSC. Continued improvements at LWSC will be important to demonstrate to attract other investors (donor and domestic).

However, this is only the beginning of breaking out of the capacity conundrum and entering a virtuous cycle in which country institutions lead a process of identifying and implementing capital investments that in turn improve performance and financials, yielding higher revenue and attracting further investments.

VIII. Lessons for Practitioners

The international community faced multiple urgent needs for humanitarian assistance as well as the challenge of rebuilding the state following Liberia's war. The complex trade-offs involved in balancing these short- and medium-term objectives played out very differently across individual sectors, depending on the nature of the trade-offs made in each. In the case of WASH services development, partner direct funding of service delivery by non-state actors from 2003 to 2010 undermined both sector policy dialogue and the formation of robust government institutions able to lead and orchestrate service delivery.

The international community missed the opportunity to shape the institutional structure of the water sector in the early post-conflict period. The lack of a substantive policy dialogue – particularly in the 2003 to 2007 period – meant that a very fragmented institutional set-up emerged at the ministerial level with no clear locus of policy authority. Due to the fragmented mandate at ministerial level, there was no regulatory oversight of LWSC, which started playing a conflicting role that cut across policy and implementation. Changing the established institutional setup – which has been unsuccessfully attempted since – remains a challenge to ongoing institutional capacity building and sector investment. An earlier move to development funding for WASH through country systems (for both urban and rural WASH) – as was done in the health sector – would have been a point of leverage to influence institutional reforms and build a nucleus of capacity to orchestrate the actions of non-state actors.

Providing intensive technical assistance can resolve the capacity conundrum but is more difficult the later it starts. Starting in 2011, WSP and other development partners supported evidence-based national planning, monitoring and review processes, which played a key role in transitioning the sector from one dominated by a humanitarian response approach to one based on longer-term development. Building a detailed picture of sector service delivery generated clear priorities on what needed to be done in the sector. The national water point baseline survey provided the new sector coordination body

NWSHPC (conceived under the WASH Compact and operationalized within the MPW) with the information to initiate systematic planning. WSP's and USAID's continued support ensured that this planning was brought together in a detailed SIP, providing a credible blueprint for priority projects, some of which have since received funding commitments. The GoL institutions responsible for WASH rallied around the SPR and JSR process and are taking greater leadership of the development agenda, which has improved sector coordination and information sharing. LWSC, in turn, has with the recent change in management and hands-on TA, refocused on its core function of service delivery and relinquished its claim on policy dialogue – though needs to keep an active role in the multi-stakeholder planning and review process.

A Sector-wide Approach to Planning (SWAp) can be built from the bottom-up as well as from the top-down. Many, though not all, of the elements of a SWAp have now emerged in Liberia albeit through a rather piecemeal process of sector strengthening (see table 2). Without the top-down impetus of a budget or sector budget support program – as was the case, for example, in Uganda in the early 2000s – bringing stakeholders around a common country-led plan, budget and implementation strategy is a slower process and one that is itself fragile. Continued donor support to the core coordination mechanisms such as the NWSHPC and the JSR process – including Sector Performance Report – is essential to continued sector learning and has the potential, in the medium term, for improving alignment of non-state actors with government plans and targets.

Addressing aid and development effectiveness issues requires recourse to a higher level of policy discourse. Only so much that can be fixed from within a sector and there are a number of key bottlenecks to the sector that will need to be addressed by GoL and its development partners in higher level fora or by ministries responsible for core functions.

Strengthening mutual accountability between the GoL's institutions and development partners in the water sector would benefit from recourse to an overarching policy

dialogue provided by either a budget support, PSG or similar cross-government process to oversee that commitments made are binding and regularly reviewed.

Equally, progress on increasing capacity for overseeing WASH service delivery at the decentralized county level will require action from the ministries responsible for core functions: the MoF for the planning and budget process, Ministry of Internal Affairs responsible for decentralization

and the Civil Service Agency responsible for civil service reform. This decentralized capacity will be essential to provide the reach required to surpass the rate of implementation achieved in 2007 and to systematically address sustainability of rural water supply and sanitation services.

Without recourse to these higher level processes the investment required to reach universal access is unlikely to be forthcoming.

TABLE 2: TYPICAL ELEMENTS OF A SWAP (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2011)

Dimensions	Typical element	Status in Liberia
Policy – coherent within the sector, linked to the legislative, planning and institutional framework and well-aligned to national policies and priorities	An umbrella policy for the sector	WASH policy gazette in 2009 but contains a number of weaknesses and inconsistencies
	A coherent series of reforms planned and ongoing	The 2011 Sector Strategic Plan sets out institutional reform program
Finance and budgets – policy loyal, bring together most significant funding in the sector, including from outside the public sector, clearly link policy and results	A sector budget that captures all expenditure in the sector	Some donor expenditure captured but not NGO and some UN agency expenditure
	Linkage with a multi-year MTEF	Ministries and agencies responsible for WASH are now integrated into the MTEF process
Institutions – functional, serve overall policy goals, have the necessary capacity to implement	A clear lead agency for the sector	The Water Supply and Sanitation Commission has yet to be put in place. In the meantime the MPW leads on rural water, LWSC on urban water. Responsibility for sanitation falls mainly to MoH but MPW is also involved due to the integrated nature of NGO WASH investments
	A sector-wide capacity-building strategy/plan	A WASH capacity assessment and plan was published in 2013
Coordination – ensures that sector stakeholders, including development partners, work effectively together, avoid duplication and prioritize their activities to reach agreed policy goals	Sector working groups that involve national and local levels as well as different ministries and civil society/private sector	There is a JSR steering group and JSR planning team but sector working groups have not been set up
	Coordination of donors by government	The NWSHPC is the sector coordination mechanism with representation from Government, donor and civil society
	A code of conduct/partnership principles	The WASH Compact was a first step in this direction but does not directly address issues of aid and development effectiveness
Monitoring and accountability – ensures transparent sector performance and reporting, fosters good governance in the sector	A joint sector review (often held annually)	A sector review has been held two years running and planning for a third year has started
	A system of performance measurement across the institutional boundaries with clear results-based indicators	The sector monitoring system is still ad hoc. There has not been a full updating of the 2011 water point monitoring exercise and there is no routine monitoring. The HH survey system delivers regular nationally representative surveys.
	Annual sector performance report	The first sector performance report was compiled in 2014

IX. Conclusion

Attracting at-scale WASH investment to fragile states emerging from crisis requires breaking the dead-lock that the capacity conundrum poses. The capacity conundrum holds national institutions in their low-capacity post-war state as they are bypassed during the emergency response. As emergency responders withdraw, however, enfeebled state institutions struggle to replace their implementation capacity, and are often incapable of providing the leadership in planning, monitoring and implementation required for a scale-up of support.

Liberia confronted this situation in 2007-2008, five years after the end of the war and shortly after the first elected post-war government assumed power. Emergency interventions in rural areas started to wane after 2007, with fragmented government water sector institutions unable to fill the implementation gap left behind, or to provide effective planning to attract funds to the sector. In urban areas, the national utility remained mired in crisis, operating at a fraction of pre-war capacity and unable to absorb its first significant investment project (MWSSRP) which had disbursed barely 50 percent two years after its expected closure date.

Starting in late 2010, WSP's engagement in Liberia aimed to address this capacity conundrum by:

- i) Generating a picture of service delivery in the sector through high quality data.
- ii) Playing an active role in the multi-stakeholder planning and review process.
- iii) Structuring the data into a sector investment plan (SIP).
- iv) Providing hands-on TA preparing institutions for investment.

Working with both government institutions and a range of development partners, WSP conducted a national water point baseline survey, a precondition for systematic planning in rural areas; subsequently funded the development of a credible and detailed national Sector Investment Plan, and; facilitated two Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs). These interventions have helped operationalize and reinforce a shift towards national sector leadership initiated by Liberia's WASH Consortium, which

received head of state backing in the form of the national WASH Compact in 2011. The WASH Compact created the National Water Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Committee (NWSHPC) within the MPW, which has since functioned as a forum for sector leadership and host to the SIP and JSR processes.

In addition to putting in place the essential elements of a SWAp overcoming the capacity conundrum requires hands-on technical assistance to prospective government implementing agencies. Though WSP's TA to WASH-related ministries and agencies in engaging with the national budget process helped temporarily raise sector allocations, it also revealed more starkly the absorption capacity problems in the MPW and pointed to the continued need to deal with the nuts and bolts of MPW's implementation capacity. However, WSP's TA to improving cost-recovery at LWSC has led to measureable financial and operational improvements reflected in the positive cost-recovery trends over the past fiscal years.

It is this combination of improving both the sector planning cycle and hands-on TA that has helped mobilize at least an additional US\$30m in investments to the Liberian WASH sector and is transitioning the sector towards systematic, country-led development.

As the post-Ebola recovery phase gains momentum in the second half of 2015, there is again the prospect that development partners face the capacity conundrum. It is, therefore, all the more important to re-double efforts to build on, not undermine, the modest progress made with domestic service delivery institutions during the inter-crisis period.

This new wave of support to Liberia should also find ways to better connect policy dialogue within individual sectors to higher level dialogue on state-building. This will help to resolve bottlenecks beyond individual sectors – such as on decentralizing – that have the potential to enhance the reach and rate of service delivery and will reinforce mutual accountability among domestic and donor sector actors, driving up investment levels to those needed for universal access.

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