

Annual WASH CSO Report – Concept Note

Assignment

Develop a Concept Note explaining the rationale, value and purpose of undertaking a joint Annual WASH CSO Report

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Background and Rationale.....	3
Benefits of an Annual Joint CSO report	4
Purpose / Aim of an Annual CSO Report.....	5
Clarifications.....	6
Conditions for success	7
Next Steps	7
Next report	8
Sources / References	8

Introduction

“We can only achieve our objectives by strengthening ourselves. The government of Ethiopia has big plans for WASH and for development, and while we, members of civil society normally feel that our efforts are not properly recognized; we also do not have consistent and harmonized systems to account for our work and our contributions. We often work in isolation and have poor communications, even with each other, let alone other stakeholders.¹”

The extract above, from the opening speech at the Water and Sanitation Forum (WSF) General Assembly meeting in July 2009, clearly sets out the context in which Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are currently operating and points to some key areas requiring improvement.

In recent years, there have been several positive steps and initiatives emerging in the WASH sector in Ethiopia. In March 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Education (MoE), the foundation of a new WASH Program in Ethiopia. This was a significant step towards improving inter-ministry cooperation and a clear indication of the Government of Ethiopia's (GoE) commitment and decision to raise the profile of the WASH sector. It also highlighted the need for greater harmonization and integration of WASH interventions to achieve universal access to water and sanitation by 2012 as set out in the GoE's Universal Access Plan (2005-2012). This same year (2006), the first annual Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF), followed by the bi-annual Joint Technical Review (JTR) processes took place, bringing together all the major WASH Sector stakeholders including the GoE, donors and CSOs, to jointly monitor and review the performance of the sector. In addition, the Development Assistance Group (DAG) Water Group (established in 2007) was also noteworthy for its focus on enhancing donor cooperation in the sector including in areas of policy dialogue and funding of WASH interventions.

With this backdrop, WASH CSOs also made significant strides and concerted efforts towards improving their coordination and collaboration, notably through the upgrading of the CRDA Water Working Group with the launch of the Water and Sanitation Forum (WSF) in February 2008. The WSF was set up to serve as the common platform for CSOs operating in the WASH sector. The forum currently has over 50 members and has structured itself into 3 thematic groups, focusing on key areas such as research, advocacy, learning, coordination and networking. It is already working closely with the three key Ministries and the DAG Water Group.

However, despite these important and vital efforts, there is room for considerable improvements to be made. WASH CSOs still feel that their interventions are not fully recognized by sector stakeholders². A certain mistrust remains between NGOs and Governmental institutions, and even more so among NGOs themselves. Too many projects continue to be sporadic in nature, and achievements, lessons learnt and key data are too often inadequately recorded and documented.

It is within this environment of both considerable efforts and dedication towards improving coordination and networking, and the ongoing challenges of data

¹ Extract from the opening speech at the Annual WSF General Assembly Meeting, 15 July 2009

² This includes media, as a recently conducted media survey on WASH coverage in Ethiopia highlighted that only 15% of WASH news stories reviewed mentioned NGOs, with 80% of journalists interviewed only using a couple of government institutions as their source of information on WASH.

recording, information sharing and establishing a climate of mutual trust and collaboration, that this paper would like to advocate for establishing an Annual WASH CSO report.

Background and Rationale

In order to convincingly present the case for an Annual WASH CSO report and the benefits this would bring to the sector, it is important to highlight the key issues this initiative would specifically address. The following is not meant to underline the shortcomings of CSOs but rather to emphasise areas and opportunities for improvement. It is also worth stressing that some of the criticisms or weaknesses listed below may not be applicable to all CSOs but by acknowledging them are still useful in designing comprehensive solutions. The relevant challenges to be tackled can be summarised as follows:

- 1) There is a **clear lack of quality, accurate and compatible WASH data** available in the sector, compounded by the **absence of a simple, reliable and accessible data management system**. The paucity of quantitative data on NGO contributions was underlined in the most recent WASH contribution study and in the 2007/08 PASDEP progress report which commented on the “lack of performance reports from some Woredas and non-governmental organisations³”.
- 2) CSO **interventions are frequently sporadic and unilateral**, with numerous instances of **efforts being duplicated** or **conflicting approaches** being adopted in one woreda by different organisations (e.g.: Incompatible NGO approaches exist when it comes to subsidies for latrine construction. Equally differing expectations from one NGO to another in relation to community contributions to projects has affected progress in some instances.).
- 3) There is a **lack of trust between WASH CSOs** themselves, leading to **unhealthy competition, slowing down of progress** and **limited recognition** of each others efforts and added value. This mistrust was clearly highlighted in the recent study on the perceptions of CSOs and Government staff on WASH CSOs interventions⁴.
- 4) Relatively **weak documentation and dissemination of information** within the WASH sector⁵, has resulted in **unsatisfactory reporting, missed opportunities in terms of learning and adopting best practices**, and the **duplication of research and studies**.
- 5) A common complaint aimed at CSOs, not just in the WASH sector but across the board is their **lack of transparency and accountability both upwards to the government and downwards to the beneficiaries** they aim to support.
- 6) The perception, by some, that **CSO interventions are not good value for money**, that **“NGOs are ‘gap fillers’ with a pronounced interest in self-perpetuation** rather than being seriously committed to development”⁶, has translated into a lack of public and government appreciation of NGO contributions.

³ Water Sector 2007/08 PASDEP Progress Report, Planning and Projects Dept, MoWR, Sept. 2008

⁴ Assessment of civil society contributions to the watsan sector in Ethiopia [2002-2006], CRDA Water Working Group, June 2007

⁵ Tellingly, 90% of journalists (media survey) said it was difficult to get information from institutions linked to WASH issues.

⁶ Information Package on NGO Contributions, CRDA and DPPC, Addis Ababa, March 2005

- 7) It is said that CSOs are sending out **conflicting advocacy messages** to decision-makers, sometimes **unable to back-up their points with documented evidence**, therefore **weakening the impact** of the case being made and reducing the **credibility of CSOs and their statements**.

By reviewing these common weaknesses and criticisms, one can clearly see a recurring challenge. Simply put, at the root of the majority of these problems appears to be issues relating to networking, coordination and collaboration. The need for CSOs to improve in these areas is not a recommendation coming from outside the sector or critics of NGOs, but a necessity emphasised by WASH CSOs themselves in the most recent assessment of CSO contributions⁷.

Although it could be argued that CSO contributions in the WASH sector are occasionally recognised and acknowledge, few efforts have been made to determine the extent of this contribution and to document it in a clear and systematic way. This concept of conducting a joint report on WASH CSO achievements is not altogether new. Most recently, in June 2007, an assessment of WASH CSO contributions between 2002-06 was conducted by the CRDA Working Water Group. This document already had the objective of providing “an updated and common understanding of civil society contributions to the WATSAN Sector”. The report recommended that similar studies be conducted “on a regular basis, at least once in five years corresponding to the government’s regular multi-year plans as in the PASDEP”. However the greatest challenge faced in carrying out this study was “either a number of competing and conflicting data sources, or data not available altogether for certain indicators”. Emerging from this is the clear need to establish a user-friendly, concise annual report format, jointly developed by WASH CSOs with simple and realistic indicators. The availability of regularly updated, compatible and easily accessible data would greatly support the sector and make future in-depth CSO assessment studies easier to carry out.

Benefits of an Annual Joint CSO report

The benefits of an Annual WASH CSO report are multiple and its value can be seen in many different ways, from programme design to service delivery, and from monitoring and evaluation to advocacy. Below is a brief summary of what this report could become for WASH CSOs in the sector.

An Annual WASH CSO Report could:

- 1) Provide a monitoring and evaluation framework and regular assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness, impacts and sustainability of WASH CSO interventions
- 2) Provide a clear, concise and structured record of WASH CSO achievements on an annual basis that can improve documentation, transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation
- 3) Provide an evidence-based document for WASH CSOs to use as a reference point and advocacy tool in highlighting their contributions and best practices in a unified and coordinated voice

⁷ See Annex C, SWOT Analysis on CSO WATSAN Operations, from Assessment of civil society contributions to the watsan sector in Ethiopia [2002-2006], CRDA Water Working Group, June 2007

- 4) Provide data and information on CSO performance that can be used as a decision-making tool, by guiding informed choices, planning and budgeting and therefore better targeting of funding and interventions
- 5) Provide an informative snapshot of CSOs' interventions that can support, guide and highlight potential areas requiring more in-depth studies and research
- 6) Become an example of successful coordination for other actors to follow and replicate, therefore potentially benefiting other development sectors

Purpose / Aim of an Annual CSO Report

Following the brief summary of the benefits of establishing an Annual WASH CSO report and what it could bring to the sector, the next section considers the key areas identified as weaknesses or challenges and how the proposed report has the potential to tackle and improve these areas.

Coordination:

By jointly producing one annual report, WASH CSOs can come together to agree on common formats, indicators and timeframes. This would provide the opportunity for CSOs to work more closely together, diminish competition and reduce duplication and conflicting efforts. Together this would greatly contribute to improving coordination and unifying WASH CSOs, thereby building a climate of mutual trust and respect⁸.

Integration:

Now that the government has developed several key monitoring and evaluation guidelines, indicators and tools for the WASH Program, an Annual CSO report provides CSOs with the opportunity to create a document that takes on board these new developments. This would not only demonstrate commitment by CSOs to better align and integrate with Government Plans and WASH criteria⁹, but in doing so improve GO – CSO relationship and contribute to sector-wide harmonisation.

Learning:

WASH CSOs in Ethiopia are numerous and a significant amount of information is generated and presented in a wide-range of publications and reports. An Annual Report representing some of the highlights, key successes and best practices in a clear and informative format would make this information more accessible and disseminated more widely. This way, the sharing of experiences is simplified which consequently increases learning and creates a more dynamic and innovative sector.

Decision-making:

By focusing on improving and harmonising data collection and the systematic recording of achievements, an Annual CSO report can become a key tool in providing decision-makers with good-quality and accurate information upon which to make strategic decisions. It is envisaged that this would help improve the targeting of interventions, more equitable distribution of services and better use of limited resources.

⁸ See bottom of p73 (of CSO study) on better relationship between GOs and CSOs than between CSOs

⁹ Improved rural water supply = 15l per day per capita + safe water within 1.5km; Improved urban water supply = 20l per day per capita + safe water within 0.5km

Transparency and Accountability:

The establishment of a clear, commonly agreed, regular CSO report would go a long way towards filling the current information vacuum regarding CSO's WASH interventions. A document outlining their performance on an annual basis would support CSOs in gaining more recognition for their efforts. However, more importantly, this would contribute to CSOs showing more transparency by clearly detailing their achievements. In turn, this would improve their accountability towards both their beneficiaries and the Government, as the report can be used to assess and measure their contributions to the sector. In other words it can be a strong feedback mechanism, highlighting what works, what doesn't and subsequently inform improvements to equity, efficiency and the effectiveness of CSO spending.

Policy and advocacy:

In the same way that the availability of WASH information, regularly updated and jointly assessed by CSOs contributes to improved decision-making, it would also provide concrete data and case studies to back-up CSO advocacy messages. Not only does the information presented become more credible when backed-up by multiple evidence-based CSO examples, the statements made carry more weight if CSOs can rally behind coordinated and jointly developed messages emerging from the Annual report¹⁰.

Funding:

The increased recognition that CSOs would gain by producing an annual joint report of their achievements, would also have the potential to attract more funding to the sector and in particular to CSOs. Donors are often risk-averse and their funding decisions will frequently be dependent on recipients showing a proven track record of achievements. Whereas an Annual CSO report may not provide separate detail on each CSO's achievements, it can provide top line information on the effectiveness of CSOs and therefore potentially raise their profile and support their resource mobilisation efforts.

Clarifications

In order for an Annual WASH CSO report to deliver and contribute to the expected outcomes mentioned it is crucial that it is not considered a shadow report. The aim of such a report is not to undermine, criticise or work independently from government, but on the contrary, is an opportunity to support the GoE's efforts to improve the quality and availability of WASH data and information, and the moves to build a more effective sector through increased coordination and transparency.

Equally, developing a joint format with commonly agreed indicators by WASH CSOs is not intended to apply a one-size fits all approach to WASH interventions. One of the strengths of CSOs is their flexibility and ability to try out new and innovative solutions. An annual WASH CSO report would encourage and support this by promoting the most successful case studies. The aspects that it would aim to streamline are the way the data is recorded (compatibility of formats), the type of information collected (standard information) and the performance indicators used (joint assessment and analysis).

¹⁰ The importance of properly documented reports and joint studies was recently underlined in the run-up to the October 2009 MSF. The organisers made a point of only allowing proper written-up reports to be presented.

Conditions for success

As with most initiatives, presenting the theory and assumptions is only the first step, and its main challenge is applying it in practice. The success and benefits of an Annual WASH CSO report therefore depend on the following:

- 1) Buy-in to the idea and concept of developing an annual WASH CSO report by a wide-range of CSOs
- 2) Active participation and ongoing commitment by CSOs in compiling the report on an annual basis
- 3) CSOs have the capacity (time and resources) to roll-out and implement the necessary steps to produce the Annual Report
- 4) Participatory approach is applied in engaging all relevant stakeholders throughout the design, planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the report process
- 5) Strategic use and timing of the Annual report to maximise its impact and dissemination

Next Steps

Bearing in mind the above, the first step is therefore for WASH CSOs to review this proposed establishment of an Annual CSO WASH Report, and discuss and agree whether they consider this to be a worthy initiative. This review may be coordinated through the Water and Sanitation Forum but could also include non-WSF members.

Proposed next steps:

Task	Responsible	Timeline
Review and discussion on Concept Note	WASH CSOs	By 21 st Oct. 09
Decision on whether to develop an Annual Report	WASH CSOs	
If yes...		
Draft Annual Report Format development	Consultant	By 30 th Oct. 09
Presentation of Draft Annual Report Format to CSOs for discussion/inputs	Consultant Inputs: WASH CSOs	Early Nov. 09 Date TBD
Revision of Annual Report Format	Consultant	By 11 th Nov. 09
If accepted...		
Process Map outlining proposed roll-out stages	Consultant	By 16 th Nov. 09
Presentation / Discussion of Process Map with CSOs	Consultant Inputs: WASH CSOs	By 20 th Nov. 09
Workshop on Golden Indicators	Consultant Inputs: WASH CSOs	By 27 th Nov. 09*
Report write-up (consolidation of all outputs)	Consultant	By 15 th Dec 09

**It may be possible to bring together the discussion on the process map and workshop on indicators in one day (if easier for logistical reasons)*

Next report

If the concept of an Annual WASH CSO report is endorsed by WASH CSOs, then the following reports will focus on developing a format and process map for the actual roll-out of the initiative. This will clarify among other things:

- Who will take the lead on this / Who will be involved?
- What resources are required to carry this out?
- What are the modalities to complete the format?
- Type of information required? Scope of report?
- What process/methodologies will be used?
- What, if any, targets should we be using? (UAP, PASDEP, MDG...)
- Deadline for completing report and most strategic completion date? (e.g.: to coincide with the next MSF) etc...

Sources / References

- Assessment of civil society contributions to the watsan sector in Ethiopia [2002-2006], CRDA Water Working Group, June 2007
- Information Package on NGO Contributions, CRDA and DPPA, March 2005
- NGO Group Performance Report for 2007, UWASNET, August 2007
- Water Supply, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) Implementation Manual (3rd Draft), October 31 2008
- National Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Program: Joint Technical Review Annual Report, October 2008
- Water Sector 2007/08 PASDEP Progress Report, Planning and Projects Dept, MoWR, September 2008
- Survey of Media Reports on WASH Issues in Ethiopia, WASH Ethiopia Movement, Mengistu Abebe (consultant), 2008