



Development Partner response to Liberia Sector Performance Report (SPR) May 2014

I. Overall reaction

A. Praise for the Government of Liberia

Congratulations to everyone who worked on this report. This is the first WASH report that was truly written by the Government of Liberia. This is a significant achievement and is applauded by all development partners. The report itself says it best: it is a “clear demonstration of unity in the face of fragmentation.” We look forward to this same level (or more) of line Ministry participation next year. Moreover, it is a well written Sector Performance Report, and a huge improvement on last year’s approach. The following comments are areas of particular concern that hopefully will be addressed in the coming years. The underlying premise of this entire process is that water, sanitation and hygiene are basic human rights which when available, directly improve the quality of life and provide the foundation for economic growth.

B. Sector Leadership

- The news on the first of April that President Sirleaf named the membership of the National Water Resource & Sanitation Board was very heartening. We encourage immediate follow-up to review and publically disseminate the Terms of Reference for the Board.
- What happened to the Water Supply & Sanitation Commission (WSSC)? It is hardly mentioned in the SPR. A regulatory agency, such as the proposed WSSC should stay on the front burner of the WASH and GOL agendas. The WSSC Secretariat, which was finally hired this year, although under-funded and under-capacitated, could potentially be used to assist the re-establishment of the Board.
- A large gap in the report seems to be the pro-active addressing of the resources and planning needed to build piped water systems in towns with populations over 5000. Currently only six cities in addition to Monrovia are slated for piped water. In order for truly transformational development to occur, all of Liberia’s municipalities need piped water. Building water treatment plants with a piped distribution system is a high-cost activity that requires a lot of planning and adequate resources so we suggest that work towards this starts during the course of the next year.
- Is there a particular reason why the sector strategic groups established out of the 2013 JSR did not meet? Meeting as sector groups and driving implementation of plans should be a priority for 2014.
- GOL could try to provide more leadership in coordination and monitoring in the WASH sector at county, district and community levels. Efforts should lead to sector county and district operational plans.

C. Other areas of consideration

- There seems to be a general lack of comment around sector capacity. Comments are sprinkled here and there but the report merits a unifying message. For instance, issues around governance, the low absorption of sector finance, and technical issues such as water quality could be brought together under one conceptual umbrella that conveys the current strengths and weaknesses of the sector in general.
- The continued fragmentation and under-funding of the sector seems to reflect a void in sector leadership as well as the on-going lack of a much needed authoritative regulatory body.

- GOL's reduction to financing unfortunately sends clear signals about where priorities lie. Going forward, GOL might consider discussing/informing development partners about plans for such reductions prior to budget presentations. We would appreciate it if the WASH Sector could enjoy the same status as roads and electricity in terms of national priorities.
- We suggest that the degree of decentralization in each county could be documented. Delegation of authority without gradual transfer to fiscal, political, and administrative autonomy will hamper transition to a truly decentralized system.
- Discrepancies in data and the years under review somewhat confusing (for some sections, the years under review are 2010 – 2013 while others it is 2011-2013). For future SPRs, it will be important to try and analyze the same time periods.

D. Notes on the Executive Summary

- The Executive Summary could benefit from a paragraph detailing the documents and WASH milestones that preceded this report. These include government policies, the WASH Compact, the Sector Strategic Plan, the Sector Investment Plan and the Capacity Development Plan.
- The decrease in government budget from 1.2% down to .4% is of concern and whilst development partner are making an effort to increase support to the sector it is discouraging to see that the government continues to not prioritize the sector. This is particularly concerning as research consistently provides evidence that improved WASH services underpin economic growth.
- The Sector Investment Plan aims at rural access to water being 67% by 2017 and the Sector Performance Report clearly shows progress in achieving this, which is excellent. Congratulations. What about sanitation and hygiene clearly being up front too, as they seem to have disappeared a bit in the Exec Summary?
- The LWSC summary on urban water supply is helpful, however given how high non-revenued water is, this could have perhaps been flagged in the Executive Summary.

Thank you for the invitation to provide feedback and comments on the SPR. Overall, the development partner community endorses the recommendations and commits to supporting them as much as possible. While we still have a long, long road ahead, it is clear that we are on a positive trajectory. We encourage all stakeholders to hold on to the vision and passion around WASH and keep up the current momentum.

The rest of this document lists specific responses to each chapter and are intended to be useful for next year's report.

II. Responses by Chapter

a. Coordination and Monitoring

- Clearly reporting is not perfect but it is a great start and improvement on previous years. Table 1 on page 19 is very helpful. It is good to see that the Akvo FLOW system will be launched in 2014 and this will help both with reporting and for the development of the 2015 WASH sector review process.
- The relationship between the Akvo FLOW quarterly reporting via phone and the quarterly reports via email document is potentially confusing to all stakeholders: NGOs, county officials, development partners, and ministries. Having two reporting mechanisms may help explain why partner compliance is proving to be slow and needs to be justified and better explained to all stakeholders. The new wash-liberia.org website is a terrific resource and beautifully constructed. It is crisp and clear, uncluttered with irrelevant data. It's a good tool – can the quarterly reporting format perhaps be loaded onto it and set up so that implementers can just punch data in?
- That said, it's disappointing that it's still a struggle to get quarterly reporting figures. The development partner community respectfully requests partners to get on board with reporting

regardless of the challenges. It may be helpful to send out a yearly calendar of when what reports are due to whom with specific dates. This brief paragraph could be at the head of every quarterly report and would only need to be updated on a yearly basis.

- We should all have our eye on slowly transitioning the quarterly reporting function from the NGOs to the counties themselves. Ideally, this could be done through the County WASH Committees.

b. Finance

- Despite all the effort, support, analyses, documents, and resources that have gone into sector planning, government budget allocation is diminishing. This really should change if Liberia is going to improve WASH access, especially for infrastructure projects.
- Given scarce resources, in the future this report could possibly prioritize “sector drivers” that should always be expected to be financed by the government. This would introduce a degree of predictability so that other sources of funds could channel their support to other areas.
- We would very much like to see the Ministry of Finance formally request support to the sector from development partners so that WASH will be included in development partner strategies.
- Development partners would also like to suggest that a feasibility study on resource mobilization be conducted.

c. Water Resources

- We are very pleased to see this topic incorporated into the report. Perhaps in the next phase of policy review and strategic planning, consideration could be given to merging WASH and water resource management.
- Future reports could advocate for the Integrated Water Resources Management road map and document if and how the various sub-sectors are conforming to it or not.
- Given the enthusiasm and participation of WASH sector ministries, consideration could be given to having the Environmental Protection Agency involved in development of the Sector Performance Report. They are very under-funded, and there might be an opportunity to collaborate with other WASH sector actors to develop water quality monitoring systems for surface water bodies in collaboration with the Ministry of Land, Mines, & Energy.
- There is a focus on tracking rainfall and flow rates of rivers and tributaries to predict future availability of water provision and electricity generation. This will be helpful in long-term tracking, but it is also important to address the issue of watershed management and monitoring to ensure long-term sustainability of water resources (both supply & quality).
- It will also be important to have the WASH sector interests represented in the review of mining, agricultural and forestry concessions, specifically the Environmental & Social Impact Assessments and environmental mitigation and monitoring plans and implementation, to ensure that these issues are clearly and effectively accounted for.
- The recommendation to *support communities, counties and districts to develop water supply plans that address water point sustainability* is an important one and could be considered for larger water supply systems as well.
- The recommendation to *sign compacts at all sub-national levels – county; district and community to allocate responsibility for sustainability* could be strengthened to include outreach and education to encourage behavior change, map watershed boundaries and promote buy-in down to the community-level. The advocacy points addressed in the report don’t seem to address watershed management and water point sustainability.

d. Rural Access

- We were hoping to see stronger recommendations put forth under the rural water portion of the report, specifically the establishment of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Bureau.
- The report highlights county level and district level WASH cluster meetings but makes little reference to the WASH committees which are supposed to be in place at community level and which are an important step in the transition to county led coordination.
- Efficient county coordination and in particular county coordinators sitting on the County Development Fund committees are vital for getting WASH funded at a local level. This is increasingly important as more and more concessionary funding needs to be allocated.
- It is recommended that discussions start early regarding a second large scale once-off waterpoint mapping exercise and production of the next Water Atlas. Ideally this should happen towards the end of 2015 to provide i) an endpoint for the 2012-2017 strategic plan and ii) a baseline for the next 2018-2022 plan.

e. Urban Access

- Why is it taking longer to fetch water in both urban and rural areas? Has any analysis been done to determine this? Shouldn't this be taking less time as things improve? The report states a possible explanation is people resettling away from the water points, however this is not consistent with the increase in rural coverage and warrants a bit of analysis.
- The Urban Water & Sanitation Section seems to say that while billings are up, collections are down. And while non-revenue water is down substantially, volume sold is also down. This can't be correct, as volumes sold are the billings; these are synonymous. Collections are a separate activity.
- The section on non-revenued water (page 52) is confusing and needs to be re-examined. If billings are up, why is LWSC not committing more resources into increasing collections?
- We were particularly pleased with the recommendation in the report for LWSC to formalize quarterly coordination meetings with development partners to maximize synergy and capacity building efforts. We believe that LWSC is in a unique position to provide leadership to urban water supply and sanitation efforts given its status as a corporation. Though there have been a few attempts to bring the partners involved in urban activities together in the past year, these could to be formalized by LWSC leadership in order to keep information flowing between different actors and improve upon the recommendations put forth in the 2012-2013 LWSC audit.
- The AfDB and a few other development partners are responding to the urban sanitation situation, but it would be gratifying to see the government also making resources available to address this chronic crisis.

f. Drinking Water Quality

- Praise goes to the report writers who made this a stand-alone chapter.
- Development partners are increasingly concerned about the lack of a coherent response to the growing evidence of widespread chronic bacterial contamination of "improved drinking water sources." Who is the ultimate overseer of this process: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Works, or the EPA? If yes to all, the role of each could benefit from being specified and enforced.
- One suggestion is to initiate a national study of groundwater drinking water source contamination to determine the primary causes of this contamination and suggest improvements in well design, siting, construction techniques, etc. to prevent future problems.

g. CLTS

- The CLTS section is really clear and concise, particularly the recommendations. The lack of well-defined MOHSW support for CLTS is a major issue. If the program is to be successful as a national model, putting key personnel (County Focal People and District EHTs) on the payroll and making resources available is essential.

h. Hygiene

- Congratulations to the sector for finally having National Guidelines. We look forward to the next step of getting them validated, launched and distributed as soon as possible.
- It would be helpful if the report included a matrix which shows achievements against the Sector Strategic Plan roadmap.
- We recommend that based on the growing evidence of widespread bacterial contamination of the majority of improved water supply sources in Liberia, all hygiene promotion efforts supported by Government and development partners should incorporate promotion of disinfection of household drinking water.

i. WASH in Health Facilities

- It's not clear how the text relates to WASH. It would be useful to see no. of toilets/latrines built in 2014 in the next report.
- Also, it's not very clear how this chapter reports against the Sector Strategic Plan.

j. WASH in Schools

- As nice as it is to see the use of Google maps in this section, the data on WASH in schools needs considerable strengthening.
- The increase in access to running water and toilets in schools seems phenomenal in terms of figures but then the text appears to disagree with this. This chapter needed a little more clarity.
- Is anything being done to get a dedicated WASH budget line into Ministry of Education budget?
- Congratulations to the government for including WASH in the curriculum.

k. Gender

- Considering the WASH-related burdens that fall on women and girls, involvement of the Ministry of Gender & Development in the sector and in writing the report for the first time is noted and much encouraged.

l. Sustainability

- This is a very important section, which could have been a bit clearer.
- The engagement of civil society engagement is impressive and it's good to see advocacy strategies emerging. The WASH media network has proved its value 10 times over.
- It's also heartening to see the important work being done for People Living with Disabilities; kudos for this.
- We wish to commend Liberia for conducting the bottleneck analysis workshop on sustainability. In future reports it would be helpful to highlight the main results and omit the details. A color legend and more text to explain how to read it would have been useful.
- Perhaps in next report it would be possible to briefly state the sustainability indicators in the recommendations?

m. Advocacy and Public Awareness

- Donor partners applaud the addition of this chapter and agree with its recommendations.
- The work of CSOs in raising in giving the WASH sector a louder public voice is recognized and appreciated.
- It's heartening to see a shift in attitude from "us versus them" to constructive dialog and more stakeholders embracing the spirit of searching for collaborative and productive ways to resolve disagreements.

Addendum Note:

There are editorial mistakes and graphs throughout the report. The next SPR could have a few completely independent reviewers that have been removed from the report writing and development process to catch these kinds of things before general dissemination or simply a once off professional edit. Just a few examples are listed below.

- on page 14 the last paragraph before the bullets
- On page 18 Line 1 Paragraph 2 under coordination
- page 21 bullet 2 under Achievements with respect to reporting
- On page 26 the first sentence starting with 'on short funding cycles'
- The comment on page 37 that the Atlas has enabled inequitable access to a functioning rural water point between clans- Is that really correct or an error?
- Both charts on pg. 128 and 129 are incomplete in terms of USAID-funded WASH Projects: I-WASH has been completely dedicated to WASH, and the LAUNCH and HANDS projects have significant WASH components, which are aimed at increasing rural access to safe drinking water and promoting positive hygiene and sanitation practices. Given that the Sector Performance Report mentions specific projects like iWASH (Table 4 on page 27); it might be worth referencing LAUNCH and HANDS as well.
- Donor commitments as listed in the report should be validated, as for some projects and donors, they are not accurate.