COWASH Planning, Performance Monitoring, Reporting Experiences, challenges, successes and lessons learned

By

Abebaw Getachew, COWASH M&E Specialist

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, Ethiopia has been developing and implementing a series of pro-poor developmental and transformation plans to end poverty and bring about social development to its citizens. Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) and Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) had been running from 2002/03-2004/05 and 2005/06-2009/10, respectively. Following the completion of these pro-poor development programmes, Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP I), that ran from 2010/11 to 2014/15, was developed with the aim of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) thereby sustaining the rapid, broad-based and equitable economic growth of the country. Since 2015/16 the second five-year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) has been operational to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As time goes on, though there is still much to be done in terms of establishing reliable Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and ensuring the quality of the data reported, the planning processes have been strengthened to encompass more sectors with some indicators and annual targets.

One of the main social sectors included in these national programmes was Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) with different depths and complexity. A number of bi-lateral and multilateral projects, including the Community-Led Accelerated WASH (COWASH) project, have been designed and supporting the attainment of the WASH targets. To accelerate the GTP rural WASH targets, COWASH has been implemented in 76 woredas of five regions in three phases: COWASH Phase I from July 2011 to September 2014, COWASH Phase II from Oct. 2014 to June 2016 and COWASH Phase III from July 2016 to June 2020.

Since 2010, there has been good progress in transforming the WASH monitoring of the country by establishing a sector-wide approach of One WASH Programme. The first National WASH Inventory (NWI I), which was conducted in 2010/11 as part of this sector-wide approach, mainly to determine the access figures, was driven by the differences in the national and international WASH indicator figures. In 2019, the country conducted the second National Water Supply Inventory (NWI II) excluding institutional and household facilities. Currently, data collection is completed and development of a computerized system is being finalized for MoWIE and to link the different Management Information Systems of the WASH sector Ministries and to get data on the WASH Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for regular performance reporting of the sector progress.

COWASH has been accelerating the GTP Rural WASH targets of the project woredas through the construction of facilities (water supply schemes and institutional improved latrines) and building the capacity of implementers and beneficiaries following the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach. This article describes the successes and challenges of COWASH working under the government WASH monitoring and evaluation system.

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2 COWASH MONITORING VIS-A-VIS GOVERNMENT WASH MONITORING SYSTEM

2.1 GOVERNMENT WASH MONITORING SYSTEM

Until 2010, there had not been one all-encompassing national WASH monitoring system in the country. In 2012, the four WASH sector ministries (Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation) signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the aim of bringing the main WASH sector partners together to facilitate their cooperation in joint planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and reporting of WASH in communities, schools, health institutions and other institutions in the country.

All the WASH sector ministries, except the Water Sector, have their own management information systems since a long time before this MoU was signed. Ministry of Education (MoE) developed its own Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Health (MoH) has a Health Management Information System (HMIS) and Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation (MoFEC) instituted a financial system called Integrated Budget and Expenditure (IBEX). However, Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy (MoWIE) is still on the process of finalizing development of Water sector Management Information System (WMIS) and all of these MISs have not been systematically linked to share WASH data and information among the WASH sectors and their WASH stakeholders and partners. Besides the lack of uniformity in the data collection, there are not also adequate numbers of WASH indicators in these management information systems.

Since 2010, the Ethiopian WASH monitoring has been revolutionized by the first National WASH Inventory (NWI I) and the WASH Management Information System availing a consistent set of WASH data (of communities, institutions and households) from all parts of the country. The development of the WASH Implementation Framework (WIF) in 2011, which was signed in 2013, has played pivotal role in transforming the WASH sector monitoring and strengthening the coordination among the sector ministries and the development of a sector-wide program called One WASH National Program (OWNP). However, the NWI I data have not been updated and used for estimating the different WASH indicator figures of the country included in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of the country. Rather, the country conducted the second National WASH Inventory (NWI II), in 2019, focusing only on revised Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for water supply. Institutional and household WASH data are expected to come from the EMIS and HMIS through creating links among the sector MISs.

Up until now, though some key indicators are established and OWNP is in place, country level indicator figures have been compiled from regional reports collected through the routine activity data collection system. Moreover, there were data inconsistencies and unreliability for many indicators and much of the data were based on estimates rather than measurements.

The current rural WASH monitoring system, which is part of the WASH monitoring system of the country, has some established indicators (Table 1) to measure the change, structural arrangement for governance, oversight, implementation and coordination (Figure 1) and a water supply management information system that is systematically linked with the other sector MISs is being finalized. Much of these indicators are reported annually, at the end of the fiscal year of implementation, and there are quite a lot of activity level data coming through the routine quarterly reporting system of the government.

Table 1: Major Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) developed for Rural WASH monitoring in GTP I &II:

Rural WASH Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Definition/description	Remark
A. Rural Community Water Supply		
1. % of rural population who have access to water supply schemes. (= *Total rural population having access to water supply as per GTP service level/Total Rural Population X 100*)	**Access:** For GTP I period, access was defined as i) potential number of people who can access 15 litres/person/day within 1.5km radius of the on spot scheme and/or piped system. For GTP II period, access was defined as i) potential number of people who can access 25 litres/person/day within 1km radius of the on spot scheme and/or piped system	Reported by Water Sector
2. % of rural population who use water from supply schemes (= *Total rural population who are actually using water from the water supply schemes/Total Rural Population X100*)	**User Number:** For GTP I, rural people who are actually using water from the water point irrespective of quantities used and distance from the water point. *For GTP II*, rural people who use 25 litres/person/day within 1km radius of the on spot scheme and/or piped	Reported by Water Sector
3. % of non-functional water supply schemes **(= *Total rural water supplies that are functional at the time of visit/Total Number of Water Supplies X100*)**	**Non-functional:** For GTP I & GTP II, Part or all of the water scheme (e.g. pump, transmission line or tap) is not working at the time of visit due to : - dry source - poor water quality that makes the water unsuitable for use - major non-repairable failure	Reported by Water Sector
B. Institutional Water Supply		
B.1 School Water Supply		
4. % of schools with drinking water supply (= *Total number of schools having access to water supply/Total Number of Schools X100*)	A school is counted to have access to water supply if the water supply is within its compound	Reported by Education Sector
B.2 Health Facilities Water Supply		
5. % of health facilities having access to water supply (= *Total number of health institutions having access to water supply/Total Number of health institutions X100*)	A health institution/facility is counted to have access to water supply if the water supply is within its compound	Reported by Health Sector

Rural WASH Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Definition/description	Remark
C. Institutional Latrine		
C.1 School Improved Latrine		
6. % of schools with improved latrine facilities (= *Total number of schools having access to improved latrine/Total Number of Schools X100*)	A school is counted to have access to improved latrine if the improved latrine is within its compound	Reported by Education Sector
C.2 Health Facilities Improved Latrine		
7. % of Health Facilities having access to improved latrine facilities (= *Total number of health institutions having access to improved latrine/Total Number of health institutions X100*)	A health institution is counted to have access to improved latrine if the improved latrine is within its compound	Reported by Health Sector
D. Sanitation and Hygiene		
8. % of Open Defecation Free (ODF) and Verified Kebeles (= *Total number of rural kebeles that are verified to be free from human faeces in open areas/Total number of rural kebeles X100*)	A kebele is reported to be Free from Open Defecation if its entire parts are free from human faeces defecated in open areas	Reported by Health Sector
9. Proportion of rural households using improved latrine (%) (= *Total number of rural households using improved latrine/Total number of rural households X100*)	A latrine is defined to be ''Improved' if it has a roof/cover, wall, door and its floor is **cleanable**.	Reported by Health Sector

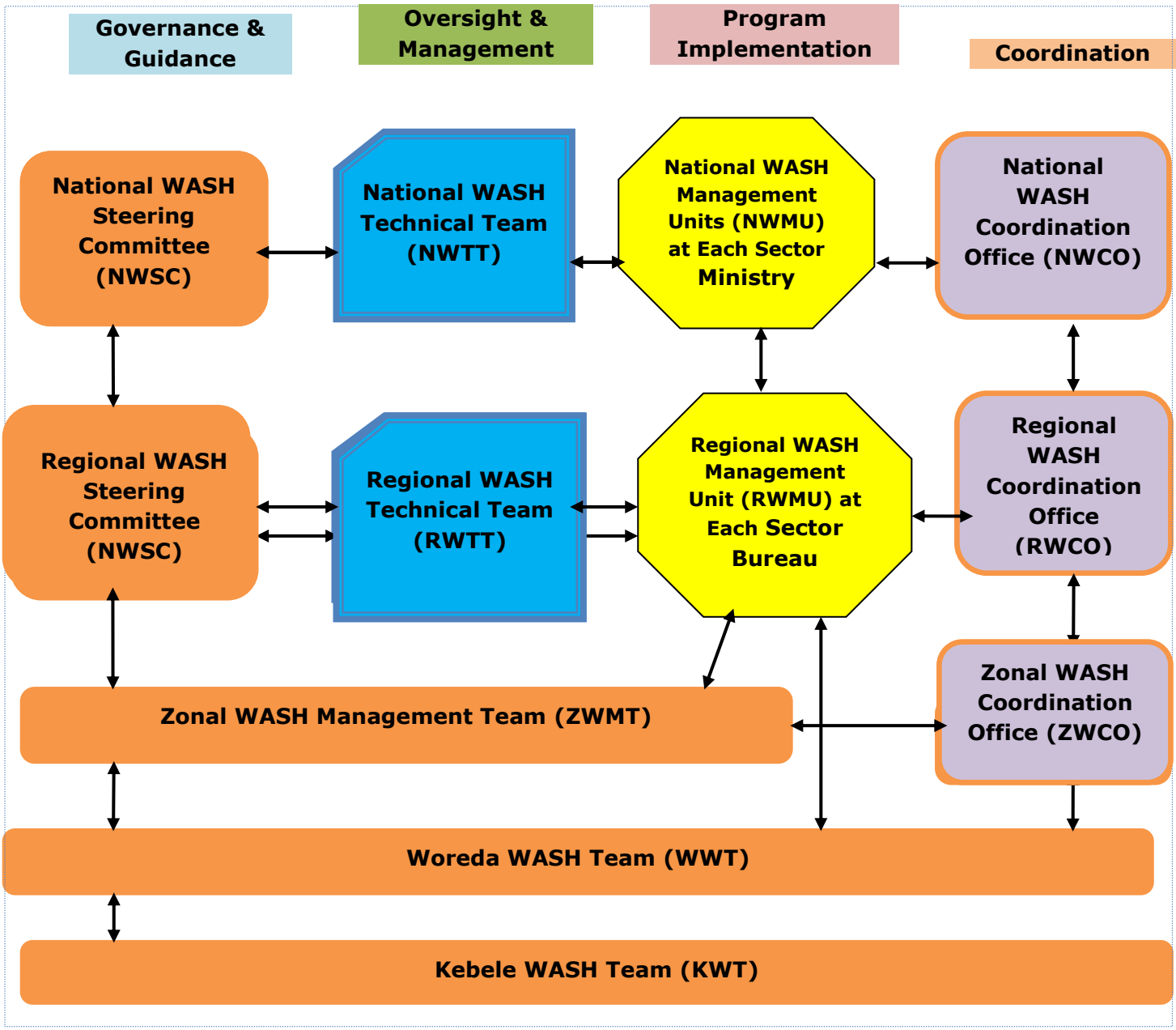
Usually, there needs to be a kind of "indicator definition book" prepared for the WASH indicators to objectively measure the sectoral targets. Nevertheless, it was learnt that many of these WASH indicators are not sufficiently defined to objectively measure the attainment of sectoral WASH targets. For instance, it is hardly possible to collect reliable data for indicators (1), (3) and (9) mainly due to the lack of consensus in the words "access", "non-functional" and "improved." As a result of lack of definitions and awareness on the computation of these indicators, there are inconsistencies between different regions and the data were based more on estimates than measurements. Moreover, in indicator (1), the quantities (25 litres per capita per day or 15 litres per capita per day) and distances (1 km or 1.5 km radius of the water supply schemes) have not been monitored and water quality has not been considered in the monitoring system of water supplies. In indicator (3), criteria for categorizing a water supply scheme as "non-functional" are

not agreed upon and the time of data collection varies across the woredas within same administrative region, who are collecting the data from kebeles. In indicator (9), there have been inconsistencies in the "improved" household latrines data due to lack of agreement on the word "cleanable" slab. Consequently, assessing progress and performances of the WASH sector using these indicators is challenging and the ambiguity of these indicators has a direct impact on the reliability of the indicators data related to bilateral projects, like COWASH, which are designed to accelerate the attainment of the GTP II WASH targets.

Governance, guidance and oversight of WASH implementation

The WASH implementation structure is portrayed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: WASH Governance, Guidance, Oversight, Coordination and Implementation



At the national level, the whole WASH implementation is guided by the National WASH Steering Committee (NWSC), its members constituted from ministries, who are signatories of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on WASH. This committee is getting technical managerial oversight support from the National WASH Technical Team (NWTT), composed of technical persons from the MoU signing ministries, established to ensure that Regional WASH management units, Woreda Sector Offices and Town Water Boards have the directions, information, systems, skills and resources necessary to carry out their WASH mandate and achieve expected program results.

Accordingly, the signatory ministries have established WASH management units (NWMU) to implement the program. The whole coordination of the WASH implementation is vested in the National WASH Coordination Office (NWCO) established under the Ministry of Water and Irrigation and Energy (MoWIE). This office ensures that National WASH Program plans, reports, monitoring & evaluation and capacity building are coordinated, harmonized and aligned by all WASH stakeholders.

The national level WASH institutional arrangement is cascaded down to the regions as per the WASH Implementation Framework (WIF). All administrative regions have established their own Regional WASH Steering Committees (RWSC), Regional WASH Technical Teams (RWTT), Regional WASH Management Unit (RWMU) and Regional Coordination Office (RWCO) to guide, manage and coordinate the WASH implementation in the region and down to the kebele level.

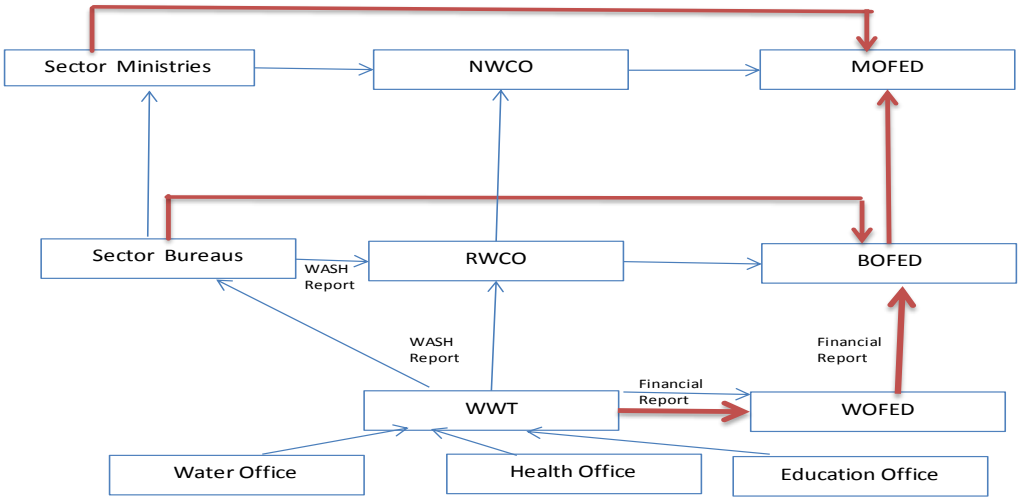
The WASH institutional arrangement narrows down as we go down the zones and woredas. At the zonal level, the WASH implementation is governed by the Zonal WASH Management Team (ZWMT) with the coordination of the Zonal WASH Coordination Office (ZWCO). The ZWMT is established to lead the WASH implementation under their jurisdiction-all woredas in the zone and zonal sector offices. At the moment, the Zonal WASH Coordination Offices do not yet exist.

At the woreda level, the Woreda WASH Team (WWT) has both a coordinating and a management function. The same is true at the kebele level, where the Kebele WASH Team (KWT) is in charge of the whole WASH coordination and management.

Flow of WASH Monitoring Data

Much of the WASH data or information is flowing as per the following flow diagram (Figure 2)

Figure 2: WASH Sector Reporting Flow



Note: Flow of Physical Report
Flow of Financial Report

Activity-level plans and accomplishments data, including inputs required for the different indicators, are flowing quarterly and annually depending on the frequency of reporting the data as per the data collection templates developed for the purpose. Woredas are collecting the activity level data from the Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Committees (WASHCO), Health Extension Workers (HEW), Development Agents (DA), utilities, NGOs, and other sources at the kebele level. The system requires preparing a Woreda level WASH quarterly report and shared to ZWT and RWSC. But, in practice, woreda sector offices are sharing their performance reports to the respective regional sector bureaus, and from there, each sector bureau compiles the woreda sector offices reports and share to the RWCO.

2.2 COWASH MONITORING SYSTEM

COWASH has developed and implemented its own Results Framework and Performance Monitoring Plan (RF-PMP). The results framework constituted the Goal, Outcome and Output indicators and targets set for the three years disaggregated by project regions. The indicators are explained or defined so as to remove ambiguity during data collection at the grassroots level. Among the indicators of the project set for measuring the attainment of the outcomes, 8 of them are the same GTP/WASH indicators (Table 1 above) and 10 of them are directly related with these indicators to measure the contribution of COWASH to attain the GTP/WASH targets of the project woredas.

The project is designed following the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and, hence, it makes use of appropriate country level mechanisms. It uses the WASH governance, guidance and oversight structure except that the chairmanship of the Regional Steering Committees is led by COWASH signatory bureaus (BoFED) during discussions on COWASH issues.

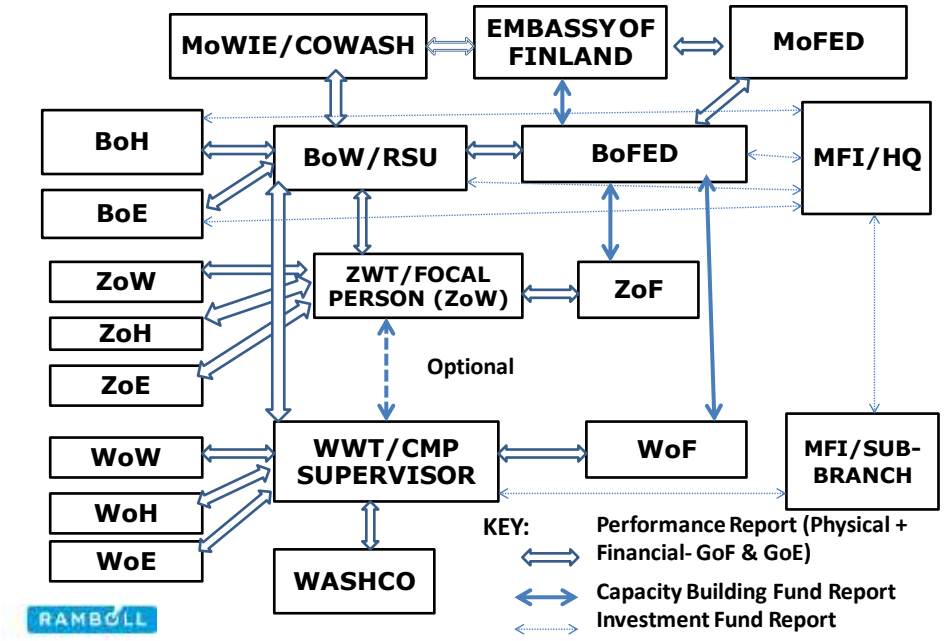
So as to save time, the project followed two planning approaches – *Core* Planning and *Detailed* Planning. Every implementation year of the project, each project region prepares "Core Plan" and approved by the regional WASH Steering Committee so as to get fund from Finland early in the fiscal year and start implementation. Once the requested fund is transferred to the regions based on the approved Core Plan, project regions start implementing some of their plans early in the fiscal year and prepare their detailed plans with the participation of all stakeholders. As their Core Plans are already approved, the physical and financial detailed plans (all activities implemented by stakeholders at the different levels) of the regions need not be approved by the Regional WASH Steering Committees. Every fiscal year, each region should organize a 2-day workshop to review the previous year implementation and to prepare the next year's detailed plan with the participation of all stakeholders. This is an excellent learning forum where stakeholders take advantage of demonstrating their good practices and/or learning from their mistakes to improve their implementations. The lessons drawn from one region will also be shared to other regions by COWASH FTAT to improve stakeholders' implementation interventions. All the project plans (physical and financial) are prepared using detailed planning templates prepared by COWASH FTAT.

Like any other government interventions, the COWASH interventions are implemented by government offices at all levels. The only exception is that, at the grassroots level, WASHCOs and Associations (Parent and Teachers and Health Associations) are wholly responsible in the planning and construction of their own facilities. At the regional level, the COWASH implementation is facilitated by a Regional Support Unit (RSU), constituting different experts, established by and housed at the regional water bureau. Each implementer regional and zonal sector government office assigns one focal person to coordinate the COWASH implementation in the sector together with his/her routine activities. At the woreda level, a project woreda water office assigns one CMP Supervisor to coordinate the whole project interventions. The kebele level implementation is

handled by WASHCOs and (Parent and Teachers and Health) Associations representing the community and institutions, respectively.

Cognizant of the fact that the bilateral project has aid or grant component, it has been implemented in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The planning and monitoring of the project interventions has been coordinated by M&E Specialists at the federal and regional levels. Figure 3 depicts the flow of project information or data.

Figure 3: COWASH Monitoring Information Flow



Note: **BoE, BoH, BoW & BoFED**- Bureaus of Education, Health, Water; and Finance and Economic Development;
MFI, MoWIE & MoFED – Micro Finance Institution and Ministries of Water, Irrigation and Energy, and Finance & Economic Development
WoW, WoH, WoE & WoF – District/Woreda offices of Water, Health, Education and Finance
WWT &WASHCO – District/Woreda WASH Team and Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Committee
COWASH – Community Led Accelerated Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene
RSU – Regional Support Unit

3 CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING BILATERAL PROJECT INTERVENTIONS

COWASH is designed to accelerate the WASH sectors' Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) rural WASH targets through the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach, which is one of the WASH implementation modalities in WASH Implementation Framework (WIF) of the country. The bilateral project is working under the existing government structure by sharing staff and resources from the government to attain its targets. Working under the umbrella of the government system requires the use of the government monitoring tools and facilities including staff. In this case, the efficiency of the bilateral project will be, directly or indirectly, influenced by the government system. If the government system is workable, the bilateral project will also bring about quality outputs, if not, the implementation of the project will be hindered and quality of outputs compromised.

Frameworks and implementation of bilateral project's interventions under the government system faces a lot of challenges. Some of the main challenges are related to systems while others have been faced during implementation. The main challenges are indicated below.

1. **System related challenges**

1.1. ***Ambiguity in the measurement of change, or indicators, and tools***: many of the water supply and latrine related WASH indicators (indicated in Table 1 above) need to be described or defined for them to bring reliable data that reflect the existing situation of the beneficiary population at the grassroots level. As presented above, there is no consensus on the definition and practicality of some important phrases, viz, water supply "access", water supply "non-functionality" and "improved" latrine. Furthermore, water supply quantity (25 l/c/d), quality (potable water), and distance (1 km radius of the water supply) have not been monitored, hence, estimations of the project contributions in attaining the WASH targets lack reliability.

1.2. Lack of structural linkage between regional project staff and Federal Technical Assistance Team (FTAT): the project does not have its own staff at the woreda and zonal level. At the regional level, a regional support unit (RSU), composed of some experts, accountable to and housed at the regional water bureau, is coordinating the implementation of project interventions in the regions. Nonetheless, these RSUs are not made accountable to the FTAT. The lack of structural link has resulted in inefficiency, in timely delivery of results, delay of implementations, and lack of qualities in outputs.

2. **Implementation related challenges**

According to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, donor funds should be aligned and harmonized with the recipient country's existing working modalities. This means that the project cannot implement its own activities with its own staff, but rather the existing government staff and working modalities should be used for the execution of the bilateral project's interventions. Cognizant of this fact, COWASH interventions have been planned and implemented by sector offices and the community representatives (WASHCOs) with the support of the regional support unit (RSU) and FTAT. Besides, the grant allocated from the Government of Finland (GoF) and the procurement, other than investment, follows the government financial and procurement system.

This shows that acceleration of bilateral project activities is heavily dependent on the efficiency of government sector offices at all levels; though the effort of the RSU staff and FTAT can increase the momentum, bilateral projects inherit the strength and weaknesses of government sector offices. Inevitably, weaknesses of government sector offices hinder the progress of bilateral project interventions, and better organized and equipped sectors perform and monitor the progress better than others.

COWASH has encountered a lot of challenges in implementing its interventions designed to accelerate the GTP/Rural WASH targets of WASH sector offices.

2.1. ***Wrong perception about COWASH****: like the other WASH routine activities,* the COWASH activities are planned and implemented by the WASH sector offices and the beneficiary community. The only difference is the fund channelling and modality of implementation of investment of the project. Despite all the efforts in raising awareness about the bilateral project, COWASH is still perceived by many as an NGO project and beneficiary sector offices staff, at all levels, expect benefits from the project. This has been affecting the implementation of the project activities, to the extent of giving low priority to COWASH activities.

2.2. Lack of enforcement of signed agreements

Micro-finance institutions (MFIs) with good outreach, one in each project region, have signed fund transfer agreement with regional Water or Finance Bureau with a commission of 3-7% of the investment fund transferred down to the woreda level and community representatives (WASHCOs). The agreements concluded with these MFIs include preparation and submission of quarterly financial report to the signed government office and reconcile the investment

fund transferred to the WASHCOs. However, almost all of these institutions have failed to submit quarterly financial report and reconcile the investment fund regularly. Some have been putting the investment money transferred from their headquarter for some months thereby delaying the implementation of the investments (water supply and institutional latrine) at the grassroots level.

2.3. Lack of commitment of woreda sector staff in executing COWASH activities

Due to the recognition of COWASH as an NGO projects, lack of commitment on the side of woreda sector offices has been observed to implement the COWASH interventions in some woredas. This is attributable to misunderstanding or lack of awareness about the nature of the bilateral project and sticking to the usual top-down project approach implemented over the years.

2.4. Not incorporating COWASH activities into sectors' staff job descriptions

COWASH activities could be implemented better if they are incorporated into the job descriptions of the sector employees. Even though sector offices have been planning and implementing COWASH activities and assigning focal persons, the project activities have not been incorporated into the job descriptions of pertinent sector employees. This lack of accountability hindered the implementation of many activities and maintaining the quality of outputs.

2.5. Bureaucracy in making decisions and execution of COWASH activities

The capacity building (human and physical) support to investment activities, which are owned by the beneficiary communities themselves, have been planned and implemented by government sector offices. The procurement and human capacity building activities, which are some of the main activities of the project, are implemented using the government financial and procurement system. In Ethiopian context, procurement of services and materials through the government finance and procurement system takes long time and this has delayed the implementation of activities. As the government finance and procurement system is used for project procurements, other than investment, the slow procurement (materials and services) has been hindering the implementation of human capacity building and support to the investment activities at the grassroots level.

2.6. Turnover of staff and decision-making bodies

COWASH activities have been implemented by sector offices with the support of the regional support unit staff and FTAT. The implementation of these activities depends on the human and physical capacity of the institutions and their coordination with other WASH sector offices. Nonetheless, it has been observed that many government sector offices in the project woredas are understaffed and turnover of staff and officials, who are members of the WASH decision-making committees, is high. Sometimes, decisions on applications of communities and institutions for COWASH funding for construction of water supply and latrine facilities have not been made for three to four months by some Woreda WASH Teams (WWTs). Consequently, implementation has been pushed to the last quarter of the fiscal year and woredas fail to meet their annual targets and too much investment and capacity building budget rolled to the next fiscal year.

2.7. Lack of attention to COWASH activities—assignment of Regional Support Unit staff to non-COWASH activities

As per the funding agreement signed between regional finance bureaus and Embassy of Finland, project regions have established Regional Support Unit (RSU), with some key experts, for COWASH implementation in the region. The unit, which is housed at and accountable to the regional water bureau, is agreed to be autonomous. The RSU staff, with technical backup from FTAT, are expected to support the different sector implementers at the regional, zone and woreda levels and quicken the implementation and maintaining

qualities. However, in some regions, some RSU experts have been given non-COWASH assignments, for a long period of time, and the implementation of the project interventions have been affected and performance reports have been delayed. Besides, some RSU staff couldn't have enough time to carry out supportive supervisions to sector offices and beneficiary communities, to evaluate the progress of the sector offices timely, and prepare performance reports as per the plans approved by the regional WASH steering committee (RWSC).

2.8. Lack of autonomy in using project property

The accountability of the RSU to the Regional Water Bureau hinders the implementation of the project. It slows down the implementation of the project interventions. As part of the capacity building support, vehicles, motorbikes and office equipments were procured for the RSU staff to facilitate and oversee the implementation of the project interventions at the regional, zone and woreda levels. Woreda sector offices have also procured motorbikes for assisting and overseeing the project activities at the woreda and grassroots level. The vehicles of RSUs, with the exception of Amhara region, have been administered under the "pooled transport system" of the regional water bureau and the RSU staff need every time permission from water bureau to carry the required field work and in some cases this permission is not granted. In many cases, reasons for not granting the permission for field work are not given.

This lack of autonomy of the RSU has been a barrier to the RSU staff to conduct their supervisions timely and improve the performance of the sector offices and beneficiary community in accomplishing their planned targets.

2.9. Delay in preparation and quality of reports

Each project beneficiary sector office is expected to prepare and submit quarterly and annual performance (physical and financial) reports, as per the agreed templates prepared by the FTAT, on their accomplishment of COWASH physical activities and budget utilization. Accordingly, these performance reports are consolidated by the RSU staff, with the technical support of FTAT, and submitted to the Finance Bureau head, who is the chairperson of the Regional WASH Steering Committee (RWSC) on COWASH, to disseminate the official report to stakeholders- Embassy of Finland, sector offices including FTAT. However, usually, beneficiary sector offices' performance reports do not come together with the government routine reports and hence the regional consolidated report have been prepared and disseminated well after 3-4 months of the end of the fiscal year.

2.10. Lack of reliable data

Lack of reliable data (for indicators) has been one of the major problems of the project. This is attributable to: i) ambiguity of many WASH indicators; ii) lack of commitment of sector staff to COWASH reporting as the activities are not part of their job descriptions; iii) CMP Supervisors are overburdened with routine activities compared with other woreda water office experts; iv) inadequate technical support from RSU staff; v) relatively high data demand from the sector offices; vi) weak coordination of sector offices; vii) reporting unreliable data and long time required for verification; and ix) communication problems-weak internet connection and telephone.

2.11. Split of project woredas and kebele

A project has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources. COWASH Phase III covers 76 woredas in five project regions: Amhara, BSG, Tigray, Oromia, and SNNPR. All rural kebeles under these woredas are eligible to benefit

from the project. Accordingly, baseline data were collected from the woredas and detailed participatory plans have been prepared and implemented.

Nevertheless, implementation of the project interventions has been affected in some woredas and kebeles due to split of administrative woredas and kebeles. The project resources in these woredas have been apportioned into the new administrative woredas and, in few of these woredas, implementation has been pending for two years. Besides, monitoring of the progress of the splitted woredas has been one of the major challenges of the project in planning and implementing WASH activities and measuring the attainment of the targets vis-à-vis the baselines.

4 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSEQUENCES

COWASH is aligned and harmonized with the government system. The existing government WASH structure and administrative system is used for planning and implementation of the project interventions. The interventions at the regional, zone and woreda levels are planned and implemented by WASH sector offices with the technical support of the regional support unit (RSU) and FTAT. Rural communities and institutions (schools and health institutions) plan and implement their own investment activities, with the technical assistance of the woreda sector offices, based on their commitment (contribution) and grant from the government.

As the project is using the government staff for the execution of its interventions, it enhances the implementation capacity of government sector offices through different means: i) awareness raising, mainly for WASH governance and oversight bodies; ii) trainings for technical staff; iii) supervisions and on-the-job technical assistances; and iv) provision of materials and equipments. The woreda level trained government staff cascades the trainings and awareness raising efforts down to the decision-making bodies (WASHCOs, Woreda WASH Team, etc.) and beneficiaries down the kebele level. This helps to expedite the implementation of the project activities and improving the quality of outputs.

The alignment and harmonization of project system to the government working modalities has consequences and opportunities. The immediate consequence is that the project will inherit the existing inefficiencies and bureaucracies of routine activities thereby implementation of the project activities are hindered and the likelihood of attaining the targets set is decreased, and quality of outputs compromised. The opportunities are related to cost, recognition and acceptance of information flow from/to the federal project governing and oversight bodies, including the technical assistance team, and beneficiaries. The specific opportunities and consequences of aligning and harmonizing the project interventions with the government system are the following:

Opportunities:

Cost minimization: The project activities are planned and implemented by WASH sector offices. In many cases, government facilities (meeting halls, vehicles and office equipment) and staff are used for implementing the COWASH planned activities. In some project areas, there is a privilege of transferring the bilateral project information or data to and from the woredas and grassroots level together with other government information or data with the government budget. Using the government facilities and information exchange system for the project purpose incurs low operational cost compared with other NGO or non-bilateral projects.

Credibility and acceptance of information:

Usually, COWASH uses the government information exchange channel. For instance, project related letters from federal technical assistance team about some serious issues are signed by

federal authorities and disseminated to the project regions' sector bureaus. All project related written communications of regional sector bureaus to woredas or down the grassroots level are signed by sector bureau's officials. All written communications from woredas to regions and regions to federal technical assistance team are signed by the respective sector officials. From experience, written communications signed by government authorities and passing through the government information exchange channel are considered credible and, in most cases, accepted by recipients. As the project is mostly using the government information exchange channel, the flow of project information via the government system improves credibility of the project information and hence acceptance by the lower government bodies.

Consequences:

Use of the government information exchange channel and systems for bilateral project purpose has also some pitfalls. The fundamental problem is the bureaucracy in procurement of materials and services. In many cases, the procurement of materials and services through the government procurement system takes months thereby slowing down the implementation pace of the project activities at the regional, district and grassroots levels. It has been observed that much procurement at the district and regional sector office levels have been rolled to the next fiscal years due to the long procurement process that the project is following.

The project faces some other problems such as lose of information and delay of information flow and feedback to and from the implementation sites. As implementation of project activities relies on the government staff and system, there have been delays in exchanging information, providing technical support and sharing performance reports of the project. As a result, there will be delays in mitigating the effect of project related challenges.

5 MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED

As the project interventions are implemented by the government sectors with technical support from federal technical assistance team and regional support units, the success of the project is highly dependent on the efficiency of the WASH sector offices and management bodies at all levels of implementation. A lot can be learnt from the implementation of the COWASH project interventions. The main lessons from the COWASH bilateral project implementation are indicated below. Many of these lessons can be inferred to many bilateral projects.

1. **Need for having a multi-disciplinary technical assistance team at the federal level**:
   The bilateral project needs to have experienced multi-disciplinary team at the federal level. This team develops planning and monitoring systems, guidelines and training materials for the project. The team shall also capacitate the regional support unit (RSU), housed at the project region's water bureau, to implement the project interventions in the respective regions. This coordination, capacity building and liaising role of the team is difficult to be managed by WASH sector focal persons at the federal level. In the absence of the guidance of this team, it is difficult to speed up the implementation of the project and to get insight into the overall progress of the project's implementation.
2. **Need for preparing "Core Plans" to get funds transferred early for implementation:**
   COWASH has a good practice in planning. It follows two planning approaches to mitigate the delay in the planning and approval of its activities. First, a "Core Plan" is prepared by project regions and approved by the Regional WASH Steering Committee to get funds transferred from Finland to start implementation early in the first quarter of a fiscal year. Once the requested amount of fund is transferred from Finland, the "detailed plan" will be prepared through a "Review and Planning Workshop" that is held with the participation of all stakeholders. During

this workshop, the previous fiscal year achievement will be reviewed and the next year plans will be prepared taking lessons from the previous year implementation.

3. **Need for having accountability of RSU to the Project's Chief Technical Advisor:** COWASH FTAT is vested with the responsibility of providing technical assistance to RSU. The structure is designed so that RSU and COWASH FTAT are linked only technically and RSU is not accountable to COWASH CTA. This structure has been hindering implementation of the project especially in monitoring the progress of the project interventions: collecting data from the grassroots level, preparing plans and performance reports and overseeing the implementation of interventions. It is learnt that the project interventions could be implemented better if the RSU is made accountable to the COWASH Technical Advisor.

4. **Need for reviewing and supporting the government monitoring system**: COWASH is designed and implemented to accelerate the government's rural WASH targets in the five-year Growth and Transformation Plans. This means that the project should adhere to the WASH sector offices' monitoring systems and working modalities. For the project to meaningfully measure its contribution in attaining the targets, the nature of the government WASH sector offices' indicators, both quantity and quality, should be doable. As indicated above, many of the indicators set for measuring the attainment of the WASH targets (water supply **access**, water supply **non-functionality**, **improved** latrine, and open defecation free, **ODF**) are defined in an ambiguous way that is difficult to collect reliable data from the implementation sites. Consequently, the project level aggregated indicator figures will not reflect the situation of the implementation sites. Though it may be costly and challenging for bilateral projects, the remedy for this is to review the government WASH sector offices' monitoring systems and technically and financially support for their revision.

5. **Need for designing bilateral projects to fit to government 5-year development planning periods:** In the last ten years, while the government Growth and Transformation planning period is five years, the different phases of COWASH have been designed and implemented for short periods- three to four years. Moreover, the different phases of COWASH have been launched one year after or phased out one year before the government GTP period. The short implementation of the bilateral WASH interventions limits the amount and depth of intended or unintended impacts of the project. Besides, this misalignment of implementation periods becomes a challenge in monitoring the progress of the interventions in the implementation sites and measuring the contribution of the project towards attaining the GTP targets.
6. **Much data requirement of bilateral projects compared with the government sector systems:**

   Every quarter, the government WASH sectors collect some data (plans and accomplishments) at all levels of the administrative structures. These plans and accomplishments data are not coded to ease the data management and analysis of the progress over the implementation periods. Some of the sectors, like MoWIE, do not have information management systems (MIS) or databases to manage their WASH data and prepare performance reports, and the available WASH sectors' MISs include few WASH indicators. Compared with the COWASH data collected, much of the government sectors' data is not disaggregated and the volume is not difficult to report quarterly.

   Usually, bilateral projects implement their own monitoring systems aligned with the existing government systems. The bilateral project systems include a number of indicators with different depth, disaggregation and frequency of reporting from the beneficiary sector offices. This has been one of the factors for the delay in COWASH performance reports from the beneficiary sector offices at all levels.

7. **Need for strong coordination of sector offices for bilateral project implementation**: COWASH interventions are implemented by WASH sector offices with the guidance and control of the WASH Steering Committees and Woreda WASH Teams. As the project systems, plans and their implementations need to get the approval of these management bodies, the success of the project depends on the strong coordination and commitment of the sector offices, who are members of the COWASH governing bodies. Over the last years of implementation of COWASH, weak coordination of the WASH sector offices has been observed at all levels of administrative structure. In many cases, it has been difficult to bring together the WASH sector offices to approve the COWASH regional plans and, hence, regional WASH steering committees approve project plans after end of the first quarter of the fiscal year. In addition, applications of beneficiary communities and institutions in the project woredas have been waiting months to get the decision of the project woredas' WASH Teams. The implementation rate of the project has been affected by the weak coordination of sector offices.