

What next after completing the first National WASH Inventory?

Suggestions from stakeholders at the national, regional, and *woreda* level

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Introduction

In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) is currently carrying out a national WASH inventory (NWI), in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Education. The inventory will provide new data on water supply schemes in urban and rural areas, sanitation and hygiene practices of households, and the status of water supply and sanitation facilities at health institutions and schools.

Phase I of the two-phase data collection process, covering Afar, Harari, and Dire Dawa, is finalised and data entry is in progress. Data collection for Phase 2, which covers the rest of the country except for Somali region, is about to start.

In October 2010, during the pilot data collection for Phase I, a national symposium was organised by CCRDA Water And Sanitation Forum, RiPPLE, and International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) on “Monitoring for Management: sharing experiences and best practice on WASH in the sector” as a contribution towards improvements in the Phase 2 data collection. The symposium highlighted the potential of the WASH inventory results for improving planning and decision-making at all levels, in particular below the national level (Butterworth et al. 2010).

Following the completion of the full WASH Inventory, a treasure trove of data will potentially be available. The usefulness of the NWI over time will be determined by the accuracy of the data, the capacity to keep the data updated and the ways they are being used by sector stakeholders. With the roll-out of second phase of the data collection underway, RiPPLE invited various WASH sector professionals to participate in a workshop held on the 3rd and 4th May 2011 in Addis Ababa to initiate discussions on what should happen after the current National WASH Inventory has been finalised. The workshop participants discussed the expectations of various stakeholders regarding NWI data and their use, as well as requirements for keeping key data from the NWI database up to date. The workshop discussions among stakeholders from the *woreda*, regional and national levels were framed around the question “What next after completing the first National WASH Inventory?”¹

NWI data accessibility and use

For the moment, the NWI data collected in Phase I will be stored in a stand-alone Microsoft Access database developed jointly by the NGO SNV and Hawassa University. The database permits easy production of standard reports such as calculating rural and urban water coverage, functionality of water schemes, household sanitation and hygiene practices, and demonstrates the water and sanitation facilities available in schools and health institutions. In addition to providing these standard reports, the system allows for other types of analysis. The database is linked to a Geographical Information System (GIS) which incorporates maps showing the spatial distribution of water supply and sanitation infrastructure.

In Phase I regions, the NWI data are currently entered into the database at the regional level, and there is an ongoing discussion about to what extent the data entry and analysis could be done at *woreda* level. The current thinking is that while data entry for Phase 2 will also happen at regional level, the *woredas* will be responsible for updating the inventory in the future. It is, however, not yet seen how this process will work in practice.

What is clear is that the signatory offices of the WASH Memorandum of Understanding – the Ministries of Water





and Energy, Health, and Education – will be asked to jointly use the database in order to develop common WASH plans. The NWI and the new WASH M&E management information system (MIS) come at a time when government and partner organisations are revising and harmonising implementation and financing guidelines for the WASH sector as a whole. To this end the government is currently finalising the WASH Implementation Framework, which will be the basis for the Ethiopian WASH program going forward. All sector stakeholders share the hope that the NWI will provide a baseline and a vehicle for developing common WASH plans. The idea is to eventually integrate the WASH M&E MIS with financial management and procurement of WASH-related services. If all goes to plan, future national WASH plans will become an aggregation of all *woreda* plans, further decentralising the planning activities now carried out in the regions.

Once the WASH M&E MIS is fully functional, all NWI data will be migrated to an SQL database, allowing online access via the WoredaNet and a greater range of functions than the currently temporary data archiving solution. Both the Microsoft Access based, and the later SQL system, will be made available to the regional, zonal and *woreda* offices.

The NWI is an important step towards improved collaboration between the MoWE and the Central Statistical Agency (CSA), and via that with the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program. There are two ways that may help bridge the current differences over access figures: first, through an agreement with the CSA, who scrutinised the methods used in the NWI, the information resulting from NWI data analysis may be published as official national data. Second, the NWI contains a household water supply and sanitation survey, which seeks similar information to the CSA's Population and Housing Census. This is the first time that MoWE and its partners are collecting 'demand-side' data to supplement the 'supply-side' data i.e. numbers of schemes and associated beneficiaries, which are normally used for access calculation by MoWE.

However, it is not yet clear when, and to what degree, the government will grant access to the data underlying any sectoral statistics resulting from the NWI. While, in principle, it would be possible to make raw data available online using the SQL system, the NWI Steering Committee is still discussing what kind of data i.e. in raw or analysed form would be made available, and how it would be shared with stakeholders outside the government.

Expectations of the NWI?

During the discussions at the workshop, it emerged that while representatives of the *woreda*, regional, and national levels had widely divergent expectations of the NWI, there were also substantial overlaps. Everyone expressed the hope that the NWI would act as a catalyst for enhanced integration between the different WASH MoU signatories, and all discussants stressed the importance of an agreed baseline to support future common WASH planning activities

between the Water, Education, and Health sectors.

National level

At the national level, the NWI is considered of crucial importance to move from a project-based implementation approach to a harmonised, nationally-owned and coordinated WASH programme. Consistent, agreed and reliable data are critical to many of the necessary progress to be made.

Donor organisations, such as DFID, see the NWI as a useful baseline against which to set targets for future support, and as a starting point for accounting for future DFID financial inputs through the government M&E MIS system. They also hope that the new dataset will enable the government to reflect on and review current implementation approaches. For example, if sanitation and hygiene coverage is found to be substantially higher in particular regions, DFID hopes that the government will then analyse reasons for identified differences between regions and review implementation approaches accordingly. The government itself also hopes to carry out substantial analysis across regions based on the NWI data, for example reviewing the unit costs of different implementation models for water supply schemes.

NGOs, such as WaterAid, also see the main use of the NWI as supporting government planning, implementation and management of WASH services. It would be good if NGOs expressed a greater stake in the NWI data as this could be a vehicle for dialogue on access figures but also on decisions, such as identifying priority intervention areas, that require greater harmonisation with the government.

Regional level

At the regional level there are two main expectations of the NWI: to put an end to the contestation over access figures, and to use the data as a baseline for planning and for various monitoring purposes. There is the expectation the NWI will provide true baseline figures on access to water and sanitation services and reveal the extent to which good hygiene behaviour is practised in Ethiopia. This should solve the problems of widely differing access figures being used by different actors in the Ethiopian WASH sector, and help attract more and better targeted contributions to the sector. A universally trusted baseline will improve future planning toward achieving objectives such as those laid out in the GoE's Growth and Transformation Plan. It will also allow for investments to be more equitable by enabling comparison of access figures across *woredas* and kebeles. In-depth information will help prioritising interventions and some hope that it might even save financial resources. In terms of monitoring, NWI will provide information down to the kebele level such as geo-referenced overview of the type of scheme, and their functionality. Some regional stakeholders hoped that NWI data would also help them monitor NGO interventions and compare the effectiveness of interventions between different NGOs.

Woreda level

While the NWI was recognised for the data it will provide for common WASH planning, the potential for analysis of the NWI data was less recognised. However, the NWI seems to have triggered additional data collection and uses at local levels, which seize the opportunity of the (fully-funded) NWI. While these processes are less formalised they can be valuable to local authorities who normally lack the resources for these types of exercises. At the *woreda* level it was striking that, while the data collection for the inventory was considered important itself, it was the process which enabled water sector staff to visit all the schemes that was seen as the major step forward. *Woreda* staff appreciated the opportunity to visit all water points in their area and carried out activities beyond data collection, such as assessing status of water point management, examining the quality of repairs made, assessing the extent of the repairs required, examining the balance between demand and supply and talking to WASH committees (WASHCOs). What was found particularly important was information on the presence of a WASHCO, the way it was organised, and the level of trust it inspires in people. These details are not captured in the NWI. None of the information collected outside the NWI is formalised in a database but it helps sector staff in their planning activities.

Apart from assessing the situation at each water supply scheme, the visits also allowed staff to immediately follow-up on some observed problems such as giving recommendations on environmental sanitation around schemes, intervening to help manage excessive water abstraction and advocating for hygienic behaviours. *Woreda* water staff also indicated that visiting each scheme allowed them to build up better interpersonal relations with the people managing the schemes and that this will help them in their future work. In short, the data collection activities of the NWI generated significant positive externalities at local and district level. However, while it is great that staff can capitalise on opportunities provided through the NWI field work it was alarming to learn that such basic visits are not a common part of their regular work.

Identified constraints in keeping the NWI up-to-date

During the workshop, representatives from *woreda* and regional level identified a number of constraints to using and updating NWI information. These related to the lack of coordination among WASH stakeholders, and to logistical and capacity problems likely to prevent water sector staff carrying out regular updating exercises.

With regard to coordination between WASH actors, all participants recognised that the NWI exercise in itself can be a vehicle for improved coordination between the MoU signatories to act in concert to improve water supply, sanitation and hygiene interventions. The NWI was carried out as a mass mobilisation, campaign-based



exercise, establishing WASH structures, in the form of task forces with representatives from water, health, and education offices, where they did not yet exist, from the kebele level upwards. However, there was a strong feeling that establishing coordination structures in the form of task forces at all levels was not a sufficient precondition to make the WASH programme work effectively. Because water supply, sanitation, and hygiene activities fall under the responsibility of different ministries, workshop participants highlighted that keeping WASH coordination alive between these ministries needs to be more strongly backed up with high levels of political commitment.

The issue of political commitment is also expressed in different views about ownership of the NWI data. While the Directorate of Water Supply & Sanitation in the MoWE feels strongly that the *woreda* is the owner of the current data, the way the data are collected, analysed and the way it will be available in the near future makes *woreda* representatives feel that the national level is the owner of the inventory data. This discrepancy in perceptions is important since the current thinking is to develop an information technology structure in which the *woreda* will be responsible for the collection, updating and analysis of the WASH data at their level. The level to which the *woreda* uses and feels responsible will be an important factor in the future reliability of the NWI.

Concerning capacity and logistical issues at *woreda* level, participants highlighted the immense differences between individual *woredas*. Those supported by donor programmes have benefited from several years of intensive capacity building and logistical support in planning and implementation. *Woredas* without donor support, on the contrary, have not received any kind of capacity building support and sometimes have no means of transport and other hardware to support their work. Participants argued that *woredas* that have not yet benefited from this kind of support were not in a good position to use NWI data to undertake WASH planning.



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In addition, geographic scope, accessibility of schemes and the total number of schemes varied widely between *woredas*, with important implications for updating data in practice. An example from among the participants was that one *woreda* only had 12 water supply schemes while another had around 150 schemes. The sheer discrepancy in the number of schemes suggests that not one updating mechanism can work for all. Depending on whether *woreda* staff have received support from NGOs or

donor organisations, they developed different reporting mechanisms in practice. One *woreda*, for example, carries out quarterly WASH supervision visits coordinated among the three WASH sectors. Another one carries out field visits to all schemes twice a year, while a third *woreda* relies mainly on telephone conversations with WASHCOs or kebele administrations to get updates on scheme functionality.

Suggestions for the way forward

The workshop participants identified three areas that will need to be addressed to keep NWI information updated and to use it for coordinated WASH planning.

- **Political commitment to achieve sectoral integration for WASH**

The idea behind carrying out a National WASH Inventory is to move from planning in sectoral silos towards integrated WASH plans from the *woreda* upwards. All participants stressed that integrated planning needed clear political commitment to steer towards integration among the WASH-related sector offices. They suggested that political commitment could be enhanced if:

At the national level, the WASH steering committee, the body representing the three MoU signatories, could be chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister to give it additional political clout. Also, at regional, zonal, and *woreda* level, politically accepted and respected individuals need to lead the WASH structures.

- **Sharing best practices in keeping NWI data up to date**

Participants suggested identifying and scaling up a variety of good practices in updating data, keeping in mind the diversity of settings in the country in terms of geographic scale, number and accessibility of schemes.

- **Realistic expectations based on local capacities**

The strong message from *woreda* and regional representatives was that updating expectations need to be aligned with the competence available at the *woreda* level and not the other way round. Two ways in which the capacity at the *woreda* level could be strengthened were identified:

- *Woreda* staff need to acquire more knowledge on reporting and analysis; there also needs to be sufficient staff to carry out updating and reporting tasks
- *Woreda* staff need more financial resources and logistical support to carry out regular monitoring activities.

1) The invitees for the first day of this workshop were a small number of water sector staff from *woredas* and regions involved in the first phase of the NWI data collection. The second day involved people from the national level such as representatives of government, funding agencies and non-governmental organisations as well as the participants from the first day to discuss the issues from *woreda* up to national level

References

Butterworth, J., Welle, K., Bostoen, K., Chaka, T. & Goshu, A. 2010. Monitoring WASH in Ethiopia: messages from a sector symposium [online] Available at www.rippleethiopia.org/documents/stream/20101222-monitoring-wash-in-ethiopia

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