

# Water SWAPs in motion

Meeting the Challenges in a Complex Sector

Produced for the Joint Learning Programme on  
Sector Wide Approaches

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## **Preface**

This paper has been developed as a contribution to the Joint Learning Programme on Sector Wide Approaches. The JLP offers sector-specific in-country learning events for development agency partners and domestic stakeholders and is financed by Denmark, EU, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. The note has been written by Nils Boesen, Jean de la Harpe and Erma Uytewaal, from the consultant team contracted to facilitate the JLP events.

The paper builds on the experiences from the JLP and the rich discussions in a workshop hosted by Europe Aid in Brussels on June 10-11<sup>th</sup>, 2008 with 24 participants from development agencies, water programmes and water research institutions. The production of the paper has been financed by the Aid Delivery Methods Programme - Europe Aid as part of its contribution to the JLP.

## Abbreviations

IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
JLP	Joint Learning Programme
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
PAF	Performance Assessment Framework
PBA	Programme based approach
PFM	Public financial management
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategies
SWAp	Sector wide approach
TA	Technical Assistance
WSS	Water and Sanitation Services

## Introduction

Does the application of the Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) to the water sector imply special challenges, and are there promising lessons to be extracted from ongoing water SWAps? This paper argues that the water sector has characteristics which prompt SWAps to focus strongly on collaborative processes between multiple stakeholders at multiple levels. National ownership and a broad vision for sector development are essential requisites for success, but challenges remain in SWAps to connect policies, plans and implementation on the ground, and to support capacity development and sector learning beyond ad hoc activities.

Many lessons have been learnt from water sector SWAps which illustrate that the approach has the potential to not only build the water sector but also to put in place mechanisms for lesson sharing, acceleration of the MDGs, accountability and more sustainable service delivery practices. If SWAps can harness this potential they certainly will become the mainstream approach to tackle backlogs and sustainability challenges in the water sector.

### What is a SWAp, and what is it not?

The Joint Learning Programme (JLP) on SWAp has stressed that a SWAp - or a programme based approach - is *a way of working* that country stakeholders and donors can agree to pursue no matter where the sector is in terms of development. It requires mutual will and interest, but it is not a definite “thing”.

The SWAp is a *process* leading to an increasingly more robust national *sector programme*. A SWAp is thus first and foremost a vehicle for *sector development*, with possible support from one or several donors as a secondary feature. In the JLP, the elements of the sector programme have been grouped in five broad headings:

- sector policies in a macro framework
- public financial management issues
- institutional capacity
- accountability and monitoring
- sector and donor coordination

Importantly, a SWAp and a sector programme are *not a financing modality for donor support* - a sector programme can be a purely domestic affair, or supported by donors through (sector) budget support, pooled funds and/or project modalities. Some modalities are more aligned to national systems than others, but support by any modality can be “on policy”, “on plan”, “on budget” and integrated in joint monitoring efforts and national sector coordination mechanisms.

This paper first outlines key characteristics of the water sector. It then presents common features of successful SWAps, followed by a discussion of challenges to water SWAps. The paper draws particularly on the experiences from water SWAps in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Nicaragua, South Africa and Zambia where learning events have been held in the context of the Joint Learning Programme on SWAps or in the context of the European Union Water Initiative.

## SWAps and the Water Sector

The water sector has special characteristics. It deals with a vital, contested and increasingly vulnerable and scarce resource. It includes a range of stakeholders from individual users to national and international institutions. However the many different stakeholders and users have different interests for which they may fight with all means. Water management challenges have created civilisations and water conflicts have led to strife and wars between neighbours, communities and countries.

To add to the challenges, the water sector is both a productive and a social sector, with water being an economic good but also the subject of right claims. Further, it combines community, public and private sector investment and service delivery using a broad and contested mixture of market mechanisms and public regulation to ensure access to water and to control resource utilisation. Water is critical to strategies for sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and growth.

It is little wonder that the sector, given these characteristics, is politically, socially, institutionally and technically complex to develop, manage, and regulate.

The complexity does not stop here: there is no easy definition of where the water sector starts and stops. In terms of use of water, it spans from household water consumption and discharge, over energy, agriculture/forestry, industry and mining, biodiversity protection and transport to tourism. Freshwater and seawater usage are linked to each other. In terms of institutions, the water sector includes organisations at community level, private sector service providers, municipalities, and catchment/watershed management agencies, with overlapping boundaries and often unclear mandates. At central level, water is a concern for multiple line ministries (water, health, education, agriculture, energy, finance etc.) as well as an issue for regional and international organisations. The challenges of climate change and food shortages add to the complexities.

There have been debates if such a dynamic and multifaceted sector as water differs qualitatively from more “traditional” sectors such as education and health which are where SWAps were initially pursued. Without taking a position on this, it can at least be confirmed that the water sector - wherever it starts or stops - has virtually as much complexity to handle as could be thought of, and more than most other sectors - without taking complexity away from them!

It has sometimes been questioned whether a SWAp under such conditions is an appropriate approach - if a sector is so complex, how will a traditional SWAp focusing on one policy, one programme and one budget play out, and how can and should the multiple actors coordinate between themselves?

Emerging lessons from the water sector show that a SWAp can be a promising answer when it is adopted as a flexible and long term process towards improved capacities for negotiation and bargaining of interests, policy making, planning, resource allocation, implementation, accountability and coordination. It is not a magic bullet - but it is hard to see alternative approaches that can

avoid the fragmentation of isolated project interventions on the one hand and the pursuit of ineffective technocratic planning ideals on the other hand. SWAps in the water sector offer a middle ground between these two extremes.

#### **Building the water sector**

Case studies illustrate that the process to developing the SWAp involves bringing the different sector players to work together in a collaborative approach.

In **Ethiopia** a task force was established under the auspices of the EU Water Initiative (EUWI) and the initial work of this task force was more about *the development of a multi-stakeholder dialogue* for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH), than to increase available funds for water resources.

In **South Africa** a *national sector collaboration office* was established to facilitate the bringing together of the sector. This included a wide range of stakeholders including the different line ministries and their respective government departments at national and provincial level, local government and its local government association, water sector NGOs, donors, civil society representatives, and water services providers, such as water boards. The Department of Water Affairs took responsibility for leading the process, however the structures established to implement the SWAp ensured participation by all stakeholders and the processes were designed to build the relationships within the sector and strengthen the sector as a whole. The success of the SWAp was precisely the collaborative relationships built between the different sector stakeholders, both vertically (from national to local level) and horizontally (across different sectors, such as water, treasury, private sector, NGOs, local government representatives, etc.)

## **Success-factors: Vision, collaboration and ownership**

### **An integrated vision, but operations in sub-sectors**

It is commonly assumed among donors that a strong sector policy framework is a pre-condition for development - and thus a key element of a sector programme. Is this a valid assumption in water, and how do overarching and sub-sector policy frameworks link to each other?

In the water sector, there is broad global agreement about the need for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), which promotes a holistic view on resources, uses, actors and rules of the game. IWRM recognises that the water sector deals with fundamental interests and is therefore inherently political, where it takes an enormous amount of data and technical inputs to enable the politics to play out in a rational manner.

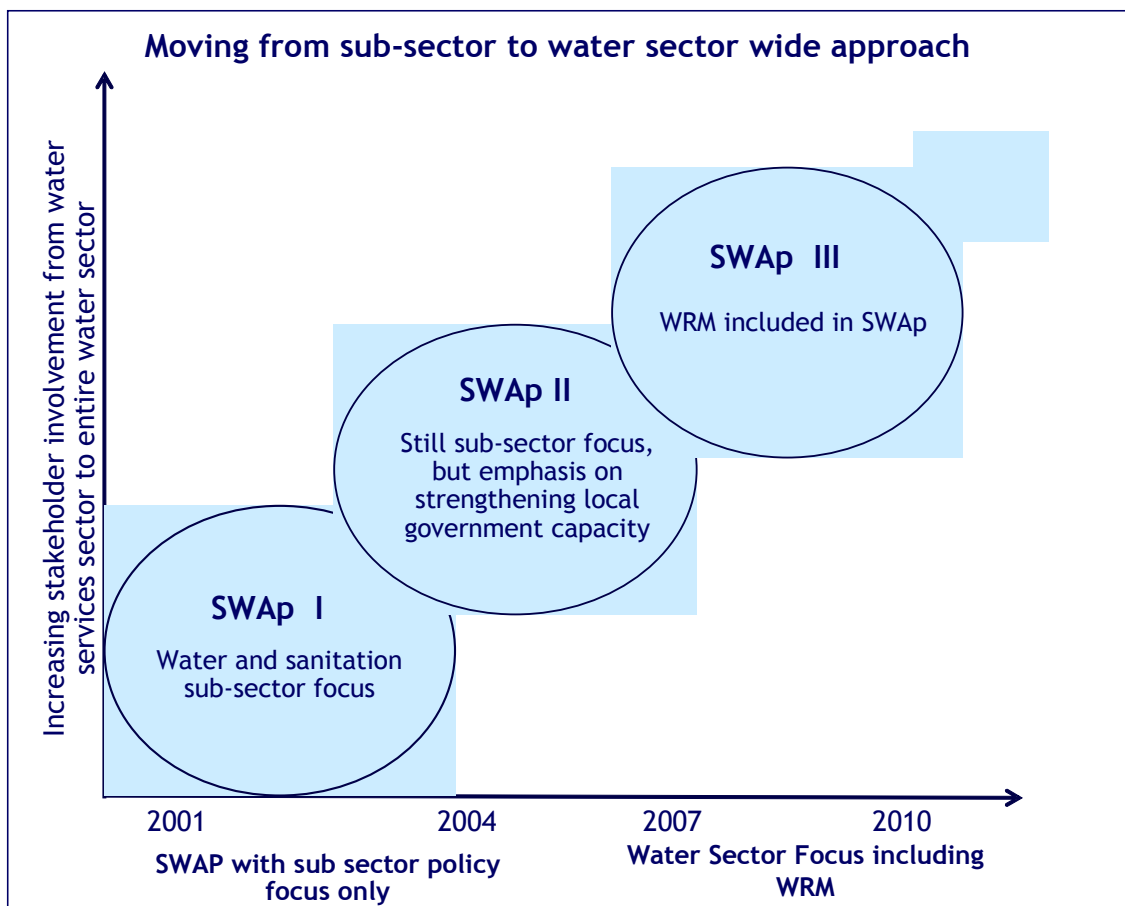
Transforming the IWRM approach into effective policy processes, policy content and efficient policy implementation on the ground is, therefore, a slow and tedious process. This is not different from the processes to plan and implement a SWAp - actually, a SWAp process is in all key aspects parallel to the IWRM approach.

Experiences from water SWAps indicate that policy is important, but the policy process is as important as the policy content when it comes to ensuring ownership and commitment. There are important lessons about the various ways a policy process can unfold:

- *One vision - many programmes:* The broad vision about the eventual unfolding of the IWRM approach is fundamental - but operational programmes need a level of autonomy that is likely to require a focus on sub-sectors, so that progress in one area is not dependent on progress in all other areas.
- *An overarching vision, not a detailed policy:* A SWAp can initially focus on a sub-sector and grow from this, eventually addressing broader IWRM issues. While a holistic vision is fundamental from the beginning, it need not be expressed in a comprehensive and detailed overarching policy. Introduced too early (or by the insistence of donors), such a policy document would not reflect a home-grown policy that has been cultivated and fostered by the multiple actors in the sector - and therefore it would most likely be ineffective.

#### Using the SWAp to develop policy: South Africa

The South African SWAp started in the water and sanitation services sub-sector and only after six years did it extend to include the water resources sector. Although South Africa had good water legislation and water policies in place at the time the SWAp commenced, there was still a need for a revised water and sanitation policy to reflect the demands of the MDGs and institutional changes associated with decentralisation. Development of the new policy became part of the SWAp where all stakeholders participated in the policy making process. As a result the policy was owned not only by the water sector but also by local government who are key to the successful implementation of the policy.



### **Towards a policy framework in the SWAp process: Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, there was no Water Sector Policy Plan when donors started making infrastructure investments. Instead there was the Universal Access Plan which identified targets, such as the water target being full coverage within 2012: at 15 l/c/d within 1.5 km in rural areas and 20 l/c/d within 0.5 km in urban areas, by means of affordable and sustainable technologies.

Although the Universal Access Plan supersedes all previous policies and plans on water and sanitation, it was viewed as overambitious and confusing by many stakeholders, particularly within the donor community. However given the political momentum around the targets, donors decided to give it credit as **the policy framework for water & sanitation**. With new resources for water services, donors later insisted on a new policy framework which also includes sanitation. This framework required close co-operation between the Health, Education and Water Resource Ministries, so as to adequately cover hygiene, sanitation and school sanitation issues.

- *Getting to broader policy frameworks takes time:* A policy framework - understood as a balance of policy processes and content that is owned and therefore effective in the broad implementation system - takes years to build, even in sub-sectors such as rural water supply. Effective policy frameworks seem to require a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes. Expanding a SWAp focusing on a sub-sector to a broader set of sub-programmes in an IWRM perspective is therefore likely to be a long process.

### **Stakeholder participation in the water and sanitation policy in South Africa**

The entire water and sanitation services sector participated in developing what is known as the Strategic Framework for Water Services in South Africa. This framework which is the overriding policy for water supply and sanitation sets targets for the different stakeholders as well as provides clarity on the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. From the initial consultation process to the final approval of the policy by the Cabinet took 18 months of intensive work with a highly committed team driving the process. The team consisted of representatives from all the stakeholders including municipalities, donors, the Department of Water Affairs, National Treasury, the Department of Provincial and Local Government, civil society and water boards. The team was also supported by a team of consultants who assisted with drafting the policy and facilitating participation.

## **Focus on collaboration and governance**

Water involves everyone, since everyone needs and uses water, every day. Few if any other sector with public involvement reaches out to every household in a country, whether through a public well or standpost, or through a house connection. SWAp experiences show that a focus on collaboration and governance in the water sector is essential for success. Formal legal and regulatory frameworks defining tasks, roles, rights and obligations are only the top of the iceberg. Collaboration between multiple and diverse actors also involves flows of funds, assignment of staff, consultative and collaborative exchanges between vertical and horizontal levels of administration - and brokering of interests and conflicts.



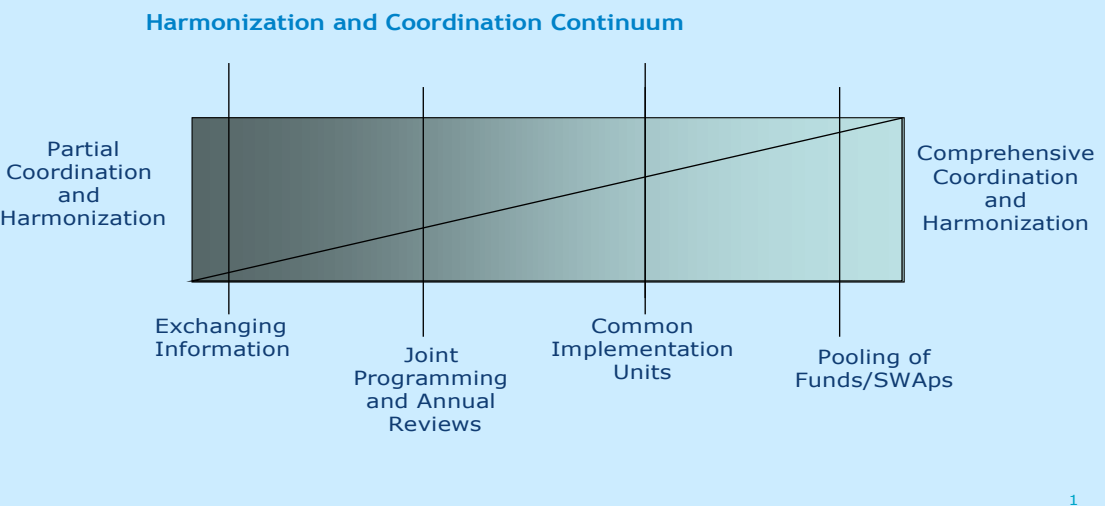
**SWAPs beyond donors:** Initially, SWAPs may focus strongly on facilitating collaboration between donors (harmonization) and between donors and the authorities (alignment). This, however, is only an initial means to focus on the much broader domestic systems of collaboration - SWAPs that successfully adopt this broader sector development focus have seen donors partnering in and supporting the strengthening of domestic collaboration, rather than focusing on their particular donor project or programme.

#### Donors and sector dialogue in Ethiopia

In October 2006 the EUWI Country Dialogue was a parallel process to many others in the would-be water and sanitation sector. Few stakeholders aimed explicitly at developing a sector approach or at creating a governance system for the sector. The dialogue process took place almost exclusively at federal level and with minimal involvement of the Finance Ministry. Although a multi-stakeholder forum took place with a joint declaration and various sector undertakings for the next year, most of the undertakings were not acted upon. Even a financing roundtable with donor did not happen. The consensual “management by committee” approach of the EUWI induced Country Dialogue **did not work as expected**, and the lack of resources, structures and systems meant that there was not mechanism to institutionalise the dialogue process within the sector.

#### Stronger stakeholder participation results in increasing coordination

Experiences from case studies illustrate that as the stakeholders come together as a sector, so too do the programmes within the sector, with increasing coordination and harmonisation on the part of donors with national government.



- **Dealing with power issues is part of water SWAPs:** Collaboration and governance implies power issues. What from a disengaged assessment is good for the sector as such will create winners and losers, both among water users and public officials. Conflict management,

facilitation and brokering are essential ingredients of water SWAps, and an area where donors may provide essential support that can be perceived as neutral.

Where the sector works together towards common objectives and targets, and where resources and technical assistance are shared to achieve these targets, a joint understanding of how to address challenges and problems tends to be built over time. This type of interaction provides the opportunity to build stronger relationships and deal with power issues. Sector wide planning processes at different levels also provide an opportunity to negotiate responsibilities and resources where the voice of local government is increasingly gaining legitimacy and influence given their critical role in services delivery.

- *SWAps are not vehicles for donor-driven reforms:* Imported models relating to e.g. regulatory roles, independent agencies, role of local authorities, privatization, outsourcing, user-fees and cost recovery schemes are likely to be very controversial in most countries. While the issues that such models address are real and have to be dealt with in due course, successful SWAps will focus on preparing the ground through participatory and consultative approaches which strengthen collaboration on the ground. Attempts to use SWAps as vehicles for donor-driven policy or reform prescriptions are unlikely to succeed.

#### **Swap in Mozambique has not speeded up decentralisation**

A SWAp in Mozambique's water sector which was intended to assist with decentralisation has not resulted in strengthening local government or in speeding up the decentralisation of water infrastructure and service delivery responsibilities to districts. Part of the problem is that there has been insufficient collaboration between the different spheres of government and other stakeholders.

## **Focus on ownership and capacity**

Water SWAp experiences confirm that national ownership is essential. A SWAp initially demands interest and political will at appropriate levels from the country authorities. Then it can work, because the country authorities can make it attractive for donors to align behind the process. Donors cannot pursue a SWAp without the authorities. They can advocate it - but experience shows that a SWAp lives with country ownership, and dies if and when that is not present.

- *SWAps are not always worthwhile:* While a SWAp is an approach that can be applied wherever the sector is, there are minimum requirements before it is worthwhile for donors to engage: an amount of government interest and commitment to sector participation, a degree of joint understanding between donors and government, and a degree of mutual interest in dialogue. In some settings, a SWAp is not worthwhile, and projects targeting delivery to vulnerable groups may be the best alternative option.
- *Broad ownership is essential:* Ownership and political will requires commitment and a minimum of initial capacity beyond e.g. the National Water Department/National Water Authority. Given the fact that water issues are of national importance in any country and involve so many actors, commitment from the highest executive level to develop the sector and to push for broad implementation is likely to be important, and actors like the Ministry of Finance and the national association for local government also have to be willing to get

on board. The participation of key stakeholders at the national level will also facilitate broader stakeholder participation in the SWAp at other levels.

**Quote from the South African Local Government Association representative:**

“We don’t call it a sector wide approach, we call it Masibambane - this means “Let’s work together”. For us it is everyone, not just the water people. Actually without us, local government, they would not have a sector, because we are a very big player in this sector. We make it our business to take ownership of every water and sanitation policy, plan, strategy, because after all, we have to implement them. Treasury must be there - they are the ones who decide the national budget, and they need to hear what the priorities are, and the donors are there too, for the same reason, but also as our partners with a commitment to our policies and goals.

This collaborative approach is getting broader now, as we are meeting with the water sector and local government across our borders, and seeing how to work together to learn lessons and to support each other, especially with the MDGs. I think it used to be the Department of Water Affairs that owned the process, the policies and so on, but not any more. They lead the process, but we all have ownership. Sometimes I think we have more ownership than they do because we implement and we are accountable to the communities.”

- *Focus on the capacity of domestic actors:* Broad implementation - as opposed to an exclusive focus on a few high visibility projects - requires that SWAps focus on the broad capacity of the water sector and/or the sub-sector. Successful SWAps are not focusing on the policy, the budget, the results and the monitoring - but on the capacity of domestic actors to agree on and commit to policy, the capacity to manage finances, the capacity to continue to produce results and the capacity to collect and use data.

**Capacity development of local stakeholders in Ethiopia**

Before being able to support the SWAp, “WaSH sector building” was the primary goal in working towards a SWAp. Following initial difficulties with bringing together all the local stakeholders, the Multi-Stakeholder Forum is being institutionalized as both a governance and accountability mechanism.

- *Champions:* A successful SWAp not only requires broad ownership, it also requires champions, both among domestic partners and donors. Experience shows that passionate individuals who have perseverance and resilience are required to get others on board, maintain focus and drive the processes forward. Unfortunately, champions may not last forever but leave for other positions.

### **A Champion in South Africa**

Mr Kalinga Pelpola, the Programme Manager of the Water Sector Programme in South Africa played a key role in championing the sector wide approach in the water sector. This role involved not only mobilising the sector and putting in place the different processes and structures to plan and implement the SWAp, but also inducting and educating the different stakeholders about what a SWAp is all about. Given the magnitude of the task, Pelpola made sure that the sector had a proper understanding of what the sector wide approach entailed and soon was surrounded by a number of champions who worked closely together to ensure strong partnerships and collaboration.

- *SWAps must adapt to a changing political context:* A new political situation after elections or after a change of minister may reduce the ownership and commitment to a SWAp. Sometimes, donors and outgoing authorities see the SWAp as a means to ensure a level of continuity, while an incoming government or minister may see it as an attempt to enforce policies upon it or him/her. Invariably, experience indicates that SWAps fail to produce continuity unless the policies and processes they promote are also broadly owned by incumbent authorities.

### **Nicaragua's SWAP and stakeholder continuity**

In Nicaragua a water SWAp was introduced in 2005 involving a range of stakeholders in the water sector. In 2007 a change of government occurred and although the new government expressed commitment to working with the SWAp, the entire process slowed down when new players came on board. Consequently many of the pre-requisites for a successful SWAp are still not in place such as proper mechanisms for co-ordination and collaboration within the sector, systems and procedures for donor harmonisation and financial accountability and reporting. The one strength in the entire process was the stability brought by those stakeholders who did not change as a result of the change of government. These stakeholders were able to ensure continuity of some of the key elements of the SWAp and what it was attempting to achieve, however as they were not in the leading role, their impact was less influential than what was required to maintain full momentum of the work begun in 2005.

## **Challenges for Water SWAps: Results, accountability, capacity, learning**

### **Results on the ground**

A sector wide approach may be appealing from a conceptual point of view because it promises to deal with the multiple, complex challenges in the water sector. The focus on capacity development for collaborative, nationally owned processes embedded in a broad vision for IWRM should lead to sustainable results. But does it? Do SWAps in water deliver improved services in terms of e.g. affordable and sustainable water supply to poor people?

- *Connecting policies, plans and implementation mechanisms:* Experiences indicate a continued challenge in linking policies to operational plans and ensuring implementation of these plans. The “transmitters” between policy and action - expenditure management, capacity at the different levels, and incentives to performance - develop slowly at best, making by-pass operations with discrete projects in cocooned implementation arrangements tempting for both donors and country stakeholders who crave for quick results.
- *Making top-down and bottom up plans and capacities meet:* SWAps may tend to concentrate their efforts at central level, spending considerable time in getting the macro-parameters right in terms of policies, overall funding, monitoring and accountability systems. Local level planning processes and capacities may fall into oblivion when powerful central level players and donors dialogue, and the quintessential encounter of top-down general directives and bottom-up adaptation to local needs and priorities may not happen. SWAps have had difficulties in giving local levels voice, while still counting on them for implementation.

#### Integrated forums and action plans in South Africa

Two mechanisms that worked well in practice to determine local needs and to address these needs was the implementation of integrated development forums and the development of action plans at municipal level in the South African context. The forums brought together different sectors such as transport, housing, water, electricity, etc. to discuss development needs across municipalities. In the case of the water sector, each municipality was then able to translate their water and sanitation needs into action plans with resource requirements which were then supported by the water SWAp, both in terms of technical support and funds.

## Accountability

**Although water resources management** is designed to safeguard both the sustainability and the equitable use of water, it is susceptible to corruption and vulnerable to the interests of the more powerful groups in society. Water and sanitation services are also vulnerable to corruption which can be found at every point along the water delivery chain, from infrastructure development through to budget allocations, to operations, maintenance, and revenue collection. In particular corruption takes place in procurement processes in capital projects (for water infrastructure), but it is also evident in management, and operation and maintenance contracts. The extent of corruption in the water sector significantly increases the cost of achieving the MDGs.

- *An avenue for broader accountability - or a narrow focus on risks for donors?* The SWAp offers an opportunity for a systemic look at the various vulnerabilities in the water sector, putting the strengthening of accountability and transparency high on the agenda. This would entail working both with the demand side for accountability (watchdog functions, user associations, parliamentary committees, media, checks and balances mechanisms) as well as the supply side (accounting practices, results reporting, transparency on budgets etc.). In practice, SWAps where donors play a significant role tend to focus mostly on the supply side, often with the explicit aim of safeguarding donor support.
- *Handling the sensitivities:* Accountability and transparency issues related to systemic problems in the water sector are politically sensitive. In a SWAp, success is also built on trustful relationships, and deciding when and how to deal with broader vulnerability issues is difficult. SWAps can be too silent - or they can be (ab)used as platforms for “unproductive bluntness”.

- *Using the SWAp to increase transparency* - donors are recognising that many developing countries, particularly those in greatest need of donor support, do not have the necessary financial management, monitoring and reporting systems in place to satisfy the requirements for direct budgetary support for a sector programme. Part of the SWAp should therefore be to assist to put in place the necessary financial, monitoring and other frameworks to increase transparency and accountability.

**Using the SWAp to incrementally set targets, address systems and procedures**

The move to a sector wide approach in South Africa was incremental. In the first three years a sector policy was developed where targets were set for the sector. In later years the financial management systems were improved. Only after 5 years did the SWAp start addressing the monitoring system in greater detail to bring together all the indicators of the sector programme into a national reporting system.

## Capacities and capacity development

The sector wide approach is about broad capacity development of the sector so that it can perform. Getting from theory to effective capacity development support in practice has proven difficult.

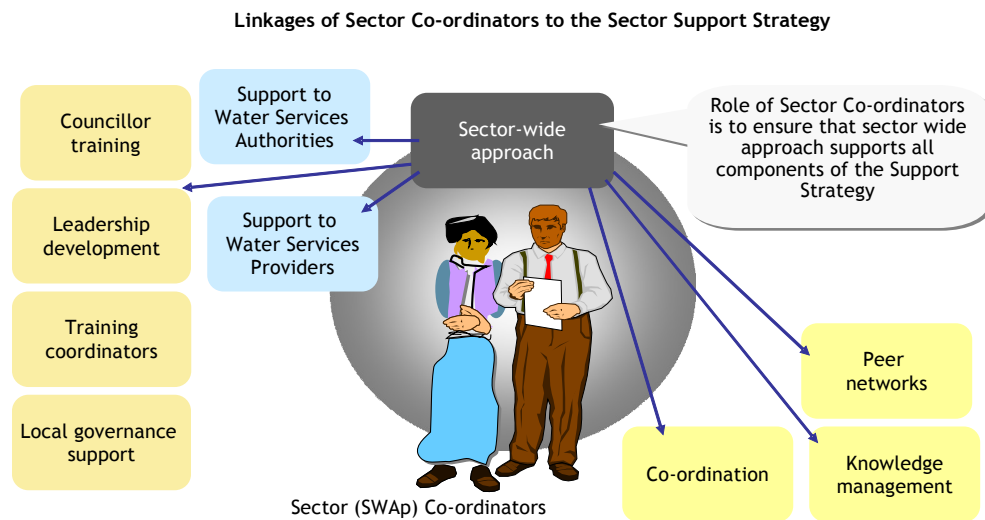
- *Moving beyond ad hoc processes:* Capacity development in a SWAp is often limited to ad hoc processes (training, workshops) that do not reach all levels in the sector or subsector. Developing sensible, broader plans for effective capacity development and implementing the plans are - with a few notable exceptions - not easy in many SWAps.
- *Getting beyond technical assistance and training.* When capacity development support is considered, it often focuses narrowly on filling apparent gaps in capacity through advisory support or training. Unleashing existing capacity through modification of mandates, changed incentives and improved platforms for collaboration is often not considered systematically.

**A sector support strategy**

Following the development of an overarching water and sanitation policy, the water sector in South Africa recognised the need for a sector support strategy. This strategy had to map out what support was needed and how it would be provided so that the sector could implement the objectives and targets outlined in the sector policy.

The sector support strategy thus became a key bridge between policy and implementation. Like the development of the sector policy, the sector support strategy was developed with the participation of the entire water sector. In particular local government played a strong role in identifying their support needs and ways to address these needs. The strategy ultimately became known as the “*Joint National Water Services Sector Support Strategy: Working together for transformation and effective delivery*”

The strategy made provision for improved collaboration and planning within the SWAp; strengthening networks for knowledge development, learning and sharing, particularly amongst peers; the development of water services support plans which identified capacity building and resource requirements within each of the major sector stakeholders; a leadership and management programme for water services managers; inductions for councillors and other sector players; and a programme to strengthen local governance capacity for water services authorities. It included the employment of additional staff at national and provision level in the Department of Water Affairs to assist in the implementation of the strategy. The sector involvement in developing the strategy was so strong that the South African Local Government Association had the authority to insist on clauses related to the employment of sector co-ordinators before the strategy could be approved by the Water Sector Leadership Group (which represents the water sector as part of the SWAp).



## Enhancing sector learning in SWAps

A final challenge which is intimately linked to capacity development concerns learning: the SWAp - and the IWRM and subsector perspectives that it supports - assume that actors learn from the processes they are involved in, and that this learning feeds back into repeated cycles of policy processes, planning, implementation and monitoring. This is not easy to achieve.

- *SWAps focusing on spending and immediate results:* The frequent use of Performance Assessment Frameworks in water SWAps should facilitate learning because it allows a systematic comparison of actual achievements compared to plans. Systematic learning is hampered, however, because monitoring is linked, implicitly or explicitly, to accountability for money spent and conditionalities for future aid allocations. The incentives for donor staff and country authorities to prioritise joint learning are simply not strong enough.

- *Getting research and learning into SWAps:* While mutual learning is routinely embraced by all stakeholders, it is rarely established as a strategic objective of water SWAps and transformed into plans and funding. The specialised actors who can effectively promote learning - national research centres, universities and think-tanks - are rarely invited to take part in SWAps.

#### Putting an emphasis on sector learning - networks in South Africa

The SWAp in South Africa has made a point of allocating sector funding to learning and sharing through various networks. These networks include a Water Information Network (WIN-SA) which fulfils an information and knowledge sharing role, the District Water Services Managers Forum where district water managers share lessons learnt concerning both water governance and provision issues, a Water Services Provider Network where capacitated water services providers network and support less capacitated providers through lesson sharing, and the City Water Managers Forum where managers compare benchmarks and indicators and best practices. Municipalities have indicated that these networks have been amongst the most useful forums for lesson learning and accessing knowledge and information, particularly concerning practical challenges related to water services delivery.

## Water SWAps without borders?

National water SWAps have come some way in several countries. But they still have a long way to go - getting from a focus on sub-sectors to a broader IWRM perspective, getting capacity development and learning stronger on the agenda, and producing convincing results on a broad scale.

But water challenges go beyond national borders. Water resource management by its very nature involves transboundary planning, decision making and collaboration. Adding climate change to an already loaded agenda, there are enormous challenges ahead which will involve “high politics” and most likely lead to several new global initiatives to address critical water related effects of climate change. For SWAps, this raises two critical questions:

- *How can SWAps deal with transboundary aspects of water resources management?* There have been various regional or river basin based initiatives trying to mediate tensions about water uses between different countries. It seems fair to conclude that their success depends on national capacity to manage water resources - country level SWAps should thus in principle facilitate integrated approaches also across borders. However, there are as yet only few experiences showing how country-level approaches and regional approaches can combine.
- *How can global initiatives be integrated in SWAps?* Climate change is likely to lead to a number of globally managed programmes which could also address water management issues. Experiences from other sector, notably health, have shown that it is often very difficult to integrate massive global programmes with globally defined agendas into national priorities and processes. Ensuring from the beginning that such programmes do not establish parallel and excessively autonomous implementation structures is a key means to keep them focused “on policy”.



A SWAp in the water sector is not a panacea for dealing with the complexities of water management, neither at local, national, regional or global level. It does, however, fit well to current thinking about IWRM and to the aid management principles embodied in the Paris Declaration. And though SWAp processes are cumbersome and slow, it is difficult to see the alternatives.