

Reflecting on Forever: Water For People Forever Workshops

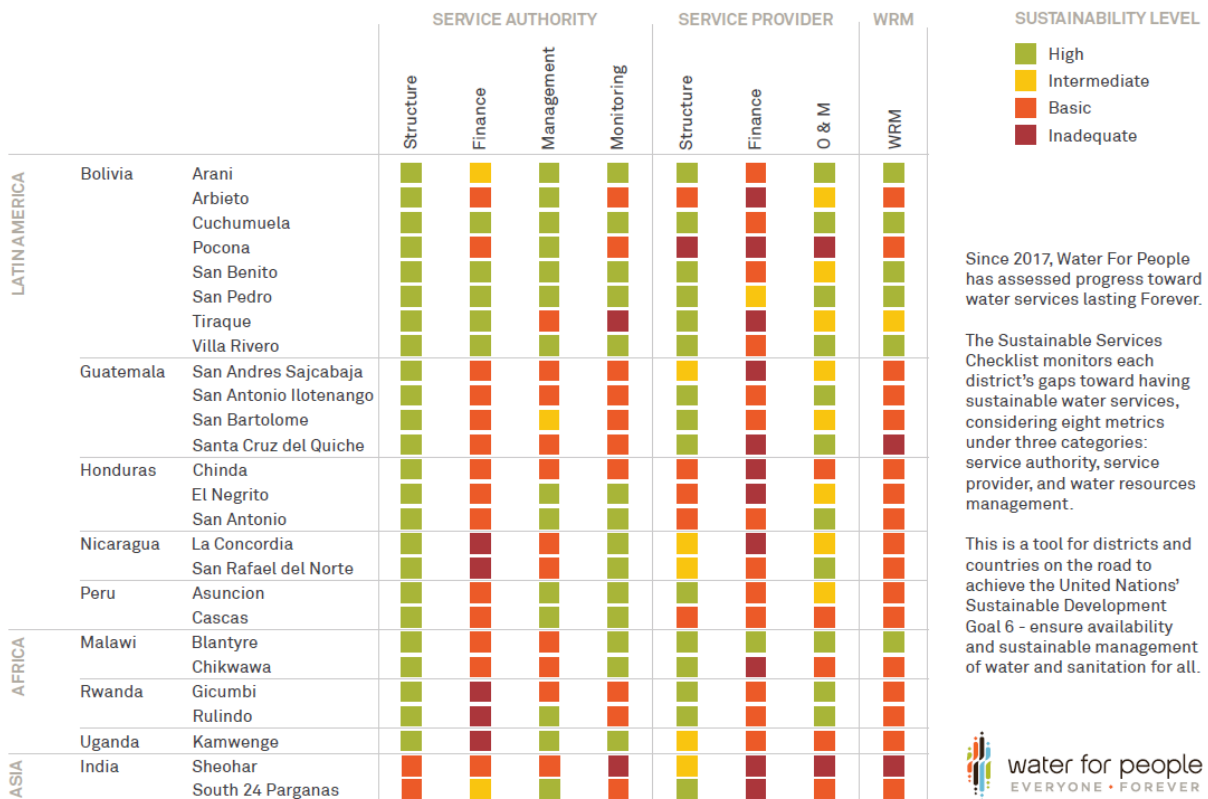
Ellen Witt
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As a learning organization, ongoing reflection is a cornerstone of Water For People’s approach. Following our annual monitoring process, Water For People hosts separate Water Reflection Sessions and Sanitation Reflection Sessions in each of our nine Country Programs. These are opportunities to review monitoring data with district partners, discuss achievements and challenges from the past year, and set priorities for the coming year. They include internal Water For People team members as well as district and other external partners, and are timed to feed into our organizational annual operational planning and budgeting process.

In addition to the Water and Sanitation Reflection Sessions, Water For People hosts an annual “Forever Workshop” to reflect on the challenges and strategies related to the sustainability of our work. Water For People collects annual quantitative and qualitative data in our Sustainable Service Checklist (SSC), with eight indicators that monitor the sustainability of our work within Service Authorities, Service Providers, and Water Resources Management. The results (Figure 1) of the SSC highlight our key areas of progress and challenges to address in the coming year.

Figure 1: 2018 Sustainable Services Checklist Results

SUSTAINABLE SERVICES CHECKLIST RESULTS - 2018



Purpose

The Forever Workshops provide dedicated time and space to talk about sustainability. Fiscal year 2018 objectives included:

- Empowering Country Program Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) champions to conduct scoring and analysis
- Discussing strategies for building sustainability, with an eye toward exit, influence and scale
- Facilitating knowledge exchange to learn from each other

Process

Forever Workshops are conducted annually with internal Water For People team members, usually the M&E Champion and the Senior Program Manager from each Country Program, as well as 2-3 team members from HQ. The Workshops are scheduled during the “off season,” before monitoring begins and after operational planning ends (usually in December or January). They are one week long and alter between being hosted regionally and with all Country Programs together. The Workshops have evolved over time from strictly training on monitoring processes and how to use costing and sustainability tools, to facilitating knowledge exchange among Country Programs on monitoring and sustainability challenges and strategies.

In Fiscal Year 2018, we hosted regional Workshops – with our 5 teams in Africa and 3 teams in Latin America, as well as our team in India. We held some large group sessions and also created 2 “tracks” that focused on either Monitoring or Sustainability. We structured many sessions to be led by Country Program participants and facilitated knowledge exchange using various techniques [adapted from the World Bank](#), moving away from HQ-led presentations. In each region, a full day was dedicated to a field visit where the host country could showcase some of their work and all participants could share similar experiences.

Following the Workshops, we ensure processes are in place for following up on action items and outstanding questions from Country Programs, as well as tracking strategic conversations for key programmatic decisions that must be made.

Key Takeaways

In 2018’s Forever Workshops, we discussed program learning, made final changes to the Sustainable Services Checklist questions for next year, and each country program presented monitoring highlights and Forever successes from the past year. M&E Champions discussed quality assurance and control, enumerator training, scoring (including lots of practice!), sampling, and updates for next year’s surveys. Forever Champions discussed how SSC results impact programming, the major Forever challenges of tariffs and water quality, as well as exit, influence, and scale (including some impressive role playing to introduce exit to district government partners!). In Uganda, we went for a field visit to Kampala to see the many steps in the sanitation value chain first hand (including gulpers and the transfer tank) and met with city authority partners. In Guatemala, we visited with rural communities and water committees and saw a social arts show. On the last day, we facilitated a “write-shop” to provide dedicated time for documenting our program work, building from the discussions on key themes throughout the week.

Key takeaways throughout the week included:

- How our sustainability indicators align with Agenda For Change system building blocks
- Clarity on how certain indicators are calculated (i.e., water quality, affordability)

- The importance of clustering and a recognized need for some functions to be carried out by a group (private or public) at a higher geographic level (i.e., circuit riders, district WASH offices, private operators)
- Decentralization of monitoring and progress toward country program-led scoring; feeling empowered to do country-specific M&E initiatives
- How to start thinking about exit criteria and engaging district partners in the exit discussion
- How we can use the Sustainable Services Checklist and financing tools for local and national influence
- A greater understanding of how our tools and systems are linked together (surveys, SSC, data, visualizations, our experiences)
- The role of M&E Champions goes beyond evaluation to help understand our program work and strategies
- Knowledge exchange creates space for reflection on how and why we do things and appreciate our successes along the way
- Workshops help create cohesion among participants - we get to know each other, learn together, share experiences, work through similar challenges, and it makes it much easier to work together moving forward

Following the Forever Workshops, we sent a survey to all participants to collect feedback and help us improve next year. All participants strongly agreed or agreed that the objectives were met and that they will be able to use what they learned in the workshop. Participants expressed the desire for more time to practice (data scoring techniques), greater participation by Country Teams in leading sessions, including participants from other regions, and combining the Monitoring and Sustainability tracks.

When asked about the most valuable components of the Workshop, teams cited sharing experiences (challenges, tools, achievements), exchange, learning from each other, and understanding more about other programs and country contexts. They gained a better understanding of sustainability strategies and how others are advancing. They valued the dynamic, participatory nature of the Workshop, visiting field work, and speaking with the various actors. Teams expressed one of the biggest benefits as increased cohesion of the team.

Moving Forward

Responding to feedback from Country Teams, next year's Forever Workshop will be hosted in our Denver HQ with participants from all nine Country Programs, creating an opportunity for global exchange. We will facilitate country-led sessions centered around our eight sustainability indicators, and we will integrate Monitoring and Sustainability champions in joint sessions (versus separating in 2 tracks). We also plan to invite our Agenda For Change partner, IRC, to observe sessions, learn about our program work, and share their learnings related to using costing tools. We hope this creates an opportunity for exchange with a key sector partner.

Water For People aims to reach Everyone *Forever* in the districts where we work. This means that water supplies are protected, managing institutions are functional and funded, sanitation services are available, and communities are aid-independent. We are working with district partners toward eventual exit. Opportunities to reflect on our work – looking at the data, discussing what's going well and what's not, learning from other programs about promising practices – allow us to identify the specific areas where we can improve our sustainability indicators and create solid systems for lasting services.