Achieving an Integrated and Well-Coordinated M&E System in Chikwawa District

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Background

Chikwawa is a district located in the southern region of Malawi, in the lower Shire Valley. It is around 54.1 Km from the Blantyre City, the commercial city of Malawi, and has a land area of 4,878 Km^2. The district has a population of 564,684 and a population density of 116 (National Statistics Office, 2019).

Located in the lower Shire Valley, Chikwawa is disaster-prone due to frequent flooding and droughts. Due to its disaster-prone status, Chikwawa has seen many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) coming to the district to complement government efforts in development and relief works.

Water For People is one of the organizations that are currently working in Chikwawa in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector. Water For People started working in Malawi in 2000 and in Chikwawa in 2007. The organization works through its Everyone Forever model which states that everyone in the district should be reached with access to reliable and safe WASH services that last forever.

Problem Statement

Chikwawa experiences erratic rainfalls and droughts. The district has aquafers that are saline, and finding fresh water is a very big challenge. Additionally, the level of service for the district has never reached the recommended level as per Water For People goals:

Every community has reliable water service
- 90% or more of communities with intermediate or high service level
- Remaining communities have basic service level

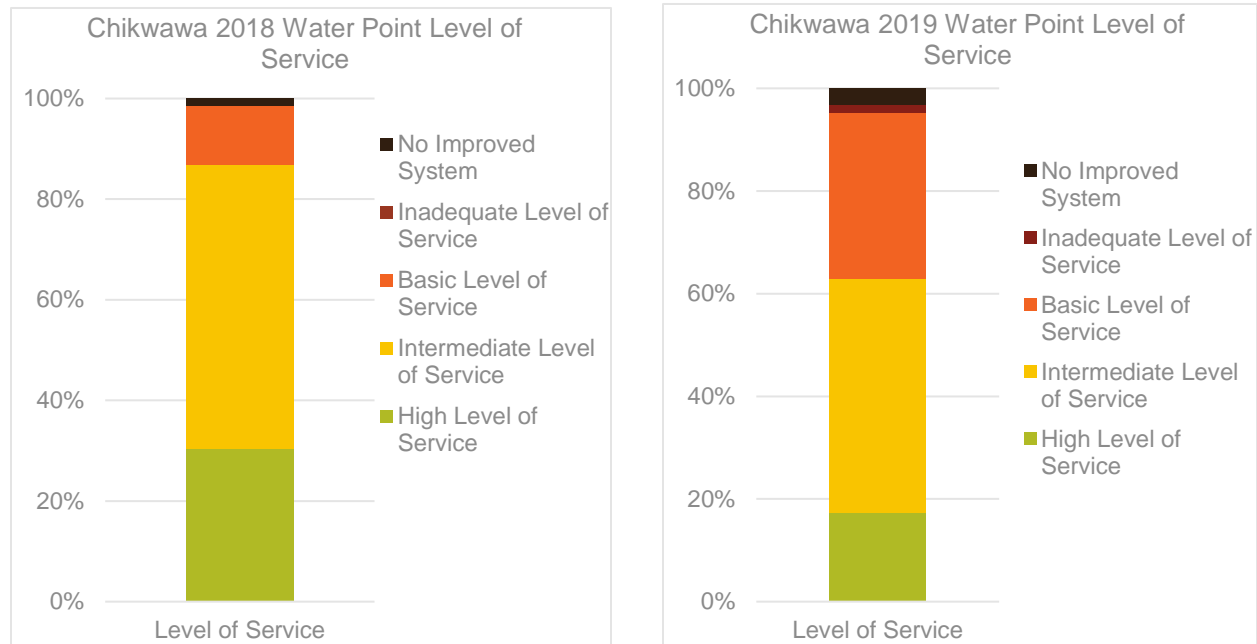**Every school and clinic has reliable water and sanitation services**
- 95% or more of schools and clinics with intermediate or high service
- Remaining with basic level of service

Families are using reliable services
- 95% or more of families with intermediate or high service level
- Those in the 5% with no improved water service have been studied to confirm they do not represent the poorest of the poor or other marginalized groups

Figure 1 shows the level of service for 2018 and 2019 based on the Water For People annual monitoring data.

Figure 1: Water Point Level of Service in Chikwawa, 2018 and 2019

Chikwawa 2018 Water Point Level of Service

- No Improved System
- Inadequate Level of Service
- Basic Level of Service
- Intermediate Level of Service
- High Level of Service

Chikwawa 2019 Water Point Level of Service

- No Improved System
- Inadequate Level of Service
- Basic Level of Service
- Intermediate Level of Service
- High Level of Service

As seen in Figure 1, 1.5% of people in Chikwawa were drinking water from unimproved water sources in 2018, and the percentage increased to 3.2% in 2019. Further combined high and intermediate levels of service dropped from 86.8% to 63.0%. According to water and sanitation reflection sessions that Water For People held with district partners in June 2019, this decrease was mainly due to damage caused by cyclone Idai.

In view of this, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) is a very important sector that requires a lot of attention in Chikwawa. Many players in the WASH sector have come to the district with their development and relief services to curb the problems the district is facing. The district government is mandated to provide development and relief services to the people of Chikwawa and has WASH programs in the district. Because NGO efforts are intended to complement government programs, the Chikwawa District Council is mandated to coordinate all development and relief activities happening in the district.

NGOs that work in Chikwawa have brought with them their own monitoring systems to help their implementation processes. Monitoring of activities is very important because it helps ensure that activities are happening as planned and corrections are made in time before things get to an uncontrollable level.

Since the district government has several ministries and departments that coordinate activities, and each department works differently, it becomes difficult to harmonize or integrate WASH monitoring activities, data, and systems. It has proven difficult for implementing partners to get accurate information needed for implementation because of these poorly coordinated government data systems. NGOs get different information from different departments, the information may be out of date, and, in some cases, important information may be missing all together. Even though data gathering requires resources, well-coordinated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities can make data gathering less costly, more accurate across departments, and time efficient. If efforts are made to integrate M&E activities, resources can be combined by different government

departments and supported by other implementing partners to make M&E activities effective and efficient. As this will ensure consistency and uniformity in M&E data, it is indeed necessary to strengthen the coordination systems and integrate M&E systems at the district level. This paper will look at the problems that the district faces due to poor coordination of activities and the gains the district can have if monitoring and evaluation systems are strengthened.

Current State in M&E Systems and Activities

Each Organization has its Own M&E System

Every organization in Chikwawa District has its own data collection and data management systems. Water For People uses a mobile application called Flow for annual monitoring. Other organizations working in Chikwawa, like World Vision International, Goal Malawi, United Purpose (UP), Red Cross, Eagles Relief, Welthungerhilfe, CARE Malawi, CADECOM, Village Reach, and Evangelical Lutheran Development Services (ELDS), each have their own M&E systems.

NGOs share their individual monitoring data in different ways. For example, Water For People shares annual monitoring results with stakeholders through annual reflection meetings to review data and progress of the past year and set priorities for the coming year. These meetings take place in Blantyre and Chikwawa and focus on WASH levels of service. GOAL Malawi shares their data, including annual and biannual reports, with stakeholders using Google Drive. They also conduct stakeholder review meetings to share progress of their activities. Organizations use different systems and processes for collecting and sharing their data, and there is currently no way to see a comprehensive picture of the various data points.

Each Government Department has its Own Database and System

Each government department works as a separate entity and has their own databases and data collection tools. For Chikwawa District Council, the departments that keep data for WASH are District Water Development Office (DWO) under Ministry of Water and Development, District Health Office under Ministry of Health, District Education Office (DEM) through the School Health and Nutrition Coordinator under Ministry of Education, and Science and Technology (MoEST) and M&E offices under Ministry of Local Government.

District Monitoring and Evaluation Office is an office that oversees all the works happening at the district. All government offices are supposed to feed the office with information to be kept for planning purposes. Other developmental organizations are supposed to share their information with the office as well. The office is under the ministry of local government. DWO uses an Excel database and mWater to keep data. The office is small compared to other departments and does not have a person to act as a monitoring and evaluation officer.

An example of lack of coordination between government offices is the lack of knowledge among the district offices as to which partner has been given obstruction rights to construct water points or water channels. Water For People, through its yearly Sustainable Services Checklist (Figure 2), conducts a qualitative study to gauge how prepared the service authority and service providers are to provide sustainable WASH services in the district. Through this study, Water For People found that district officers do not know which partners has been given the obstruction rights by the National Water Resources Authority (NRWA) even though district officers are responsible for providing obstruction forms to the partners. The district offices do not get a copy of acceptance by the NWRA, and this creates an information sharing gap.

Figure 2: Sustainable Services Checklist Results, Chikwawa 2017- 2019

Evaluation Parameters		Results: Level of Sustainable Services		
		2017	2018	2019
Service Authority	Structure	High	High	High
	Finance	Basic	Basic	Basic
	Management	Basic	Basic	High
	Monitoring	Basic	Basic	Basic
Service Provider	Structure	Intermediate	High	Intermediate
	Finance	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate
	O&M	Basic	Basic	Basic
WRM	WRM	Inadequate	Basic	Basic

Another crucial government department that keeps data related to WASH is the District Environmental Health Office (DEHO). The DEHO keeps data in an Excel database that is separate from District Health Information System (DHIS), which keeps other health related data. There is no linkage in the data sharing between DEHO and District Council M&E Office, creating a gap that needs to be filled. The same applies to the District Education Managers Office. This office collects data in schools, including WASH data, which is not systematically shared to the District Council M&E Office for consolidation and storage.

Different Committees do their Own Monitoring

In terms of monitoring, Chikwawa District has several committees that monitor WASH activities. Some of these committees include District Coordination Team (DCT), Civil Society Network under WASH thematic area, Area Development Committees (ADC), Area Executive Committee (AEC), Village Development Committee (VDC), Area Pump Mechanics (APMs), Water Point Committees, and Water Users Associations (WUAs).

All these committees have a stake in conducting monitoring of district WASH activities and share progress reports among committee members. These committees help in coordinating and monitoring of WASH activities in the district. However, each committee acts as an individual entity, and there is no proper system in which these committees share or report information. This creates a gap in information sharing and a missed opportunity that needs to be explored. If reports from different committees are shared within an integrated M&E system, partners could easily access the information and learning could be strengthened. The system should be controlled by the District Council and updated information should be free and easily accessible to partners.

Challenges Caused by a Disorganized M&E System

Duplication of Efforts

With the current trends of a poorly coordinated M&E system, there has been duplication of efforts in some areas. When organizations want to start a project in Chikwawa, sometimes they go through the District Council and other times, they may approach implementing organizations like Water For People. They may be assigned more disadvantaged areas than others, and there are often cases of organizations constructing boreholes in an area that already has boreholes.

Water For People Chikwawa officers have been receiving calls from an organization that wants

to start WASH projects in Chikwawa. This is a sign of weak district systems because such information is supposed to be taken from district government offices like DWO and District Council.

Uncoordinated Monitoring Activities

The monitoring of activities by different government departments, NGOs, and committees has many draw backs:

- It becomes costly, since separate committees or partners go on monitoring visits to monitor the same community or activity. This could be less costly if efforts were coordinated and resources were combined to go on the monitoring visits together. If monitoring is well coordinated, resources could be diverted to do other activities to improve the WASH status of the district.
- There is no harmonization of monitoring reports that makes learning between committees and stakeholders difficult to achieve.
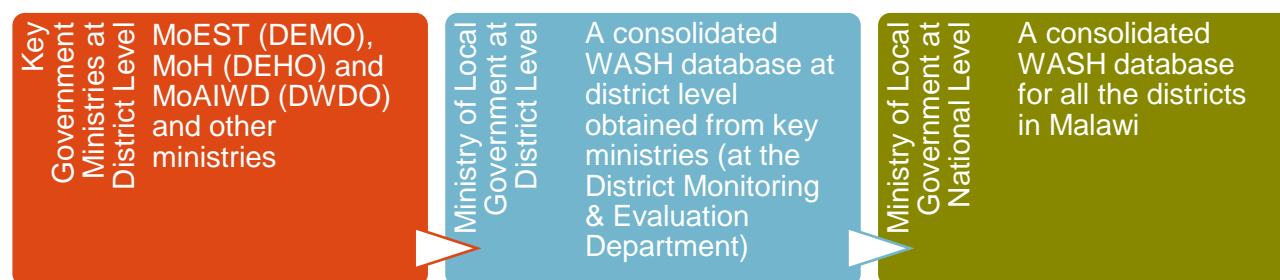
Lack of Important Data in Key Ministries

With the current trends, there are a lot of gaps in data management from key ministries like the District Council under Ministry of Local Government. The District Council needs to be fed with data from different ministries and departments, but this is not happening, creating a big gap in the availability of data in the district.

An Overview of a Proposed M&E System

Figure 3 shows how data could flow from the district level to the national level, if an integrated M&E system is implemented. At the district there are mainly 3 ministries that collect data for WASH. These include: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) through District Education Office (DEMO), Ministry of Health (MoH) under District Environmental Health Office (DEHO), and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD) through District Water Development Office (DWDO).

Figure 3: WASH Data Flow Chart from District to National Level

Key Government Ministries at District Level	Ministry of Local Government at District Level	Ministry of Local Government at National Level
MoEST (DEMO), MoH (DEHO) and MoAIWD (DWDO) and other ministries	A consolidated WASH database at district level obtained from key ministries (at the District Monitoring & Evaluation Department)	A consolidated WASH database for all the districts in Malawi

MoEST mainly collects WASH data in schools, MoH collects WASH data in hospitals, health centers, and health posts, and MoAID collects data for water in communities. There is often an overlap in the data that is being collected (e.g., water points in schools by MoEST and water points in public institutions by MoAID).

The system in Figure 3 shows that the data for WASH collected form the above-mentioned ministries should be delivered to Ministry of Local Government and Urban Development through the District Monitoring and Evaluation Office. The District M&E Office should consolidate the data,

match the data, and conduct data audits to ensure that the data is valid. The data should then be kept in their system and shared with its headquarters office in Lilongwe at the national level. The headquarters office should consolidate data from all districts in the country which will help the government in conducting national budgets. The consolidated information will be useful for the government and other stakeholders. Despite keeping the data in hard drives by the ministries, the Government should also consider storing data in a secure, cloud-based system, such as One Drive, Drop Box, or other platforms. The government ministries should also share data through their websites for stakeholders to use.

The role of NGOs and other developmental stakeholders like Water For People, World Vision International, Welthungerhilfe, Habitat for Humanity, and others should be to support the government ministries in all processes of WASH data gathering, storing, and sharing. These stakeholders should provide technical expertise in data management, build capacity of government officers in M&E, and provide resources to help in data management. These partners should also share data with the line ministries to be conciliated at district level and then national level following the data flow mentioned above.

At the district, there are mainly two committees that coordinate WASH activities. These are the District Coordination Team (DCT) and Civil Society Network (CSN), which has a WASH arm that oversees WASH activities happening in the district by Civil Society Organizations. Figure 4 shows the proposed flow of monitoring reports from district coordination committees through the district database to the national depository database.

Figure 4: Proposed Coordination Committee Report Sharing Flow diagram
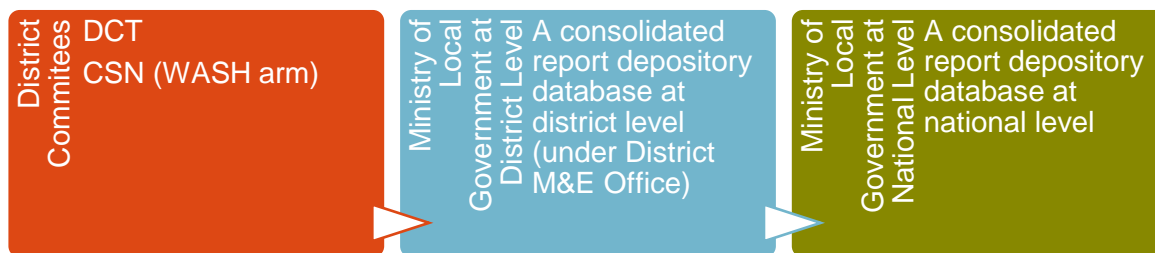

Figure 4 shows that these committees should submit monitoring reports to the government through Ministry of Local Government and Urban Development District Monitoring and Evaluation Office. The District M&E Office should consolidate and store the reports in its database. The consolidated reports should also be shared to the headquarters offices, just like with the proposed data flow in Figure 3. Depositing reports electronically in a cloud-based shared drive should also be taken into consideration.

Why We Need an Integrated M&E System

Integration of a district M&E system is very important because of the following reasons.

Well-allocated Investments Depending on Need

An integrated system will ensure sufficient, accurate, and timely data to inform developmental partners of areas that need more investment and to avoid duplication of efforts. This is in line with Water For People's Everyone milestone in which efforts are made to reach everyone in the district with safe, reliable, and sustainable access to WASH services. If duplication of efforts is minimized, more people will be reached and the milestone will be achieved faster.

Easy Updating and Access of Accurate Database

With the proper processes in place, there will be a continuation of good data management practices and information sharing. The district will have rich and more accurate data for extraction for a long period of time. There will be continuous updates of the database since all the partners will be greatly involved in the district M&E system. This is a good measure of sustainability and in line with Water For People's Forever milestone which encourages the strengthening of systems that will sustain WASH services in the district and allow development partners to exit.

Ensure the Development of District Development Plan that is Evidence-based

The development of a comprehensive and well-represented District Development Plan will be backed by accurate information extracted from the data in the integrated M&E system.

Less Costly and Better Time Efficiency of M&E Activities

An integrated system will ensure that monitoring of activities is less costly, and more effective and efficient. Committees, NGOs, and government departments will be able to plan together for monitoring and share tools and reports for monitoring. Partners will be able to collaboratively identify gaps share resources to fill them.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, having an integrated district WASH M&E system has a lot of advantages. The District Council needs to have one database that consolidates data from all government and NGO partners working in the district and allows for extraction of consistent data to share across partners. It is highly recommended that the District Council M&E Office build and support this consolidated database, with input from government departments, NGOs, and committee partners. The District Council M&E Office should also create a platform where all reports from different stakeholders and coordination committees are stored within the same M&E system.

It is important to note that every development organization that wants to implement activities in the district is mandated to go through the District Council. It is the mandate of the Council to allocate target areas for implementing partners depending on the need for that area. With the integrated M&E system, the allocation of sites will be easier and need based.

To harmonize the data management systems, the district will need to agree with all of its partners on tools, storage mechanisms, and protocols. As discussed above, each NGO, committee, and government department has their own way of monitoring and collecting data. There is a need for the District Council to harmonize the tools and data storage system.

Each monitoring system and partner's role should be clearly described and linked to the higher authority in terms of reporting structure. This should also include the proper system in which committees, district structures, and non-governmental partners in WASH should coordinate with each other in monitoring and activity implementation. It should also incorporate report sharing mechanisms among these partners. Furthermore, there is a need to have well outlined timelines in data sharing and report sharing. NGOs and other actors should help in facilitating the data sharing process like providing platforms for report sharing resources with the government

References

National Statistics Office (2019). 2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census Main Report.