

Briefing Note

Training Session on Strengthening the Enabling Environment: What does it really mean and how do you go about it?

Background

Many interventions in the WASH sector do not always have the impacts that we would hope for and even where these are successful, they can remain as isolated pilots and are not translated into scaled up, permanent solutions. The reasons why we do not see comprehensive progress are myriad, and reflect the complexity of the sector in which we operate. Success relies on the right combination of institutions and organisations working together at different levels – from end users, private sector suppliers and local and central governments – as well as a range of elements being in place, including sustainable financing, effective markets, appropriate technologies, monitoring, regulation, learning and innovation and strong coordination. Collectively this is often referred to as the *'enabling environment'*.

What is the Enabling Environment and how is it defined in the WASH sector?

The concept of an Enabling Environment (EE) is not new one and is commonly utilised for example in the education sector; a useful definition of the enabling environment for development can be adapted from the work of the World Bank in the social sector:

The enabling environment is a set of interrelated conditions –legal, organisational, fiscal, regulatory, informational, political and cultural – that impact on the capacity of development partners, including national governments, donors and NGOs to engage in developmental processes in a sustained and effective manner.

Source: adapted by the author from Thindwa (2001) ⁱ

Despite the WASH sector becoming more proficient at delivering infrastructure for first time access (e.g. pumps, pipes and toilets), attention has increasingly shifted to the other 'soft' dimensions of the entire system that is able to keep infrastructure working and delivering sustainable services. It is important to recognise however that because the WASH sector does not exist in isolation, many aspects of the EE are also influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, by broader conditions in any given country. For example, efforts to improve the capacity of a cadre of local government WASH staff will be dependent on the effectiveness of wider public administration procedures; likewise, the level of involvement of private operators will be influenced by national reforms relating to private sector participation and public-private partnership arrangements. A useful way to visualise these layers of complexity is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Overview of levels in the Enabling Environment



Source: adapted from UNICEF (2016) and Allan (2001)

Over some years’ various organisations have invested in defining and capturing the EE as part of attempts to improve their strategic understanding of how their work fits within a broader context. Whilst there are variations between these definitions they share a set of common elements which cut across both the core WASH sector and the broader governance context (the two inner concentric levels from Figure 1 above). Several examples are given in the table below, but it should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list and that some of these approaches were developed to assess specific programme interventions, most notably for sanitation.

Table 1: Elements of Enabling Environment frameworks utilised by different organisations

Strengthening EE	Elements of an EE			
	UNICEF (2016) ⁱⁱⁱ	UNICEF (2016) ^{iv}	WSP (2008) ^v	GLAAS (2014) ^{vi}
EHP, WSSCC, USAID, UNICEF, WSP (2004) ⁱⁱ				
Policy improvement	Policy	Policy making	Policy, Strategy, and Direction	Policies
Institutional strengthening	Leadership and institutional arrangements	Service delivery arrangements	Institutional arrangements	Institutional arrangements
	Markets	Financing	Cost-effective implementation	Laws
Financing and cost-recovery activities	Budgets and financing	Budgeting	Financing	Finance
Cross-sector and public-private partnerships policies	Pro-poor financial arrangements	Planning	Partnerships	Plans
Community involvement	Human resources	Capacity Development	Implementation capacity	Human resources
		Monitoring and learning	Monitoring and Evaluation	Monitoring
		Coordination	Availability of products and tools	
		Regulation and accountability	Program methodology	

Monitoring progress in the Enabling Environment

As well as defining what is meant by the EE, some progress has also been made to measure changes in the EE over time. To date these have largely been applied at national level, but they include useful pointers and tools for assessing elements of the environment which can be applied at lower levels. The principal examples are:

Table 2: Overview of example Enabling Environment frameworks

Tool	Organisational lead	Function
WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool (WASH-BAT)^{vii}	UNICEF	Provides an analysis of bottlenecks for WASH service delivery and generates costed, prioritized action plans that are developed with the consensus of all major sector players
Service Delivery Assessment (SDA, previously called Country Status Overviews)^{viii}	Water and Sanitation Program (World Bank)	Provides a summary of WASH sector progress, benchmarks service delivery pathways and identifies issues that might be inhibiting progress. The tool scores progress in three areas (or pillars) of service delivery: enabling service delivery, developing services and sustaining services.
Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS)^{ix}	World Health Organisation/UN Water	Provides standardised data on sector inputs (finance, institutions, human resources etc.) to enable policy makers at all levels to make informed decisions about sanitation and drinking water

This briefing note was prepared by Harold Lockwood (Aguaconsult, UK) to accompany the one-day training session at the 2016 WASH Futures Conference, Brisbane delivered by Professor Barbara Evans (University of Leeds, UK) and Bronwyn Powell (CS WASH Fund, Australia).

Resources

- ⁱ Thindwa, J., “Enabling Environment for Civil Society in CDD Projects”, Washington DC: World Bank, Social Development Family, CDD Learning Module, 2001;
- ⁱⁱ Environmental Health Project, USAID; Joint Publication 8 “The Hygiene Improvement Framework A Comprehensive Approach for Preventing Childhood Diarrhea” HP, UNICEF/WES, USAID, World Bank/WSP, WSSCC; May 2004; http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/watsan2005/annex_files/EHP/EHP3%20-%20Hygiene%20improvement%20framework%20-%20preventing%20childhood%20diarrhoea.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF, “Monitoring the Enabling Environment for Sanitation” in Sanitation Monitoring Toolkit; accessed April 2016; <http://www.sanitationmonitoringtoolkit.com/sanitation-monitoring-toolkit/monitoring-the-enabling-environment>
- ^{iv} Jiménez, A., LeDeunff, H., Avello, P., and Scharp, C.; “Enabling Environment and Water Governance: A Conceptual Framework”; UNICEF Revised version: 11 March, 2016; file:///C:/Users/hlockwood/Downloads/WGF-Enabling-Environment-and-Water-Governance_March-20161.pdf
- ^v Rosenweig, F., “Synthesis of Four Country Enabling Environment Assessments for Scaling Up Handwashing Programs” Water and Sanitation Program Report, Global Scaling Up Handwashing Project; April 2008; http://www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/hw_synreport.pdf
- ^{vi} UN Water GLAAS: www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/glaas/en. In GLAAS finance and human resources are considered inputs rather than elements of the enabling environment.
- ^{vii} UNICEF WASH-BAT; <http://www.slideshare.net/jircuser/6-hutton-wash-bat>
- ^{viii} WSP SDA/CSO; <https://www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/CSO-Synthesis-Report.pdf>
- ^{ix} UN Water GLAAS: www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/glaas/en.