

# ENABLING ENVIRONMENT AND WATER GOVERNANCE



## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR **SUSTAINABILITY**





This briefing note provides a conceptual framework for understanding the governance of water and sanitation (WASH) services in the context of the broader Enabling Environment for effective and sustainable WASH service delivery. It draws on elements of Enabling Environment and Water Governance perspectives with a view to ease the conversation and understanding pertaining to the needs of the WASH sector.

## **THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT AND WHY IT MATTERS TO WASH SERVICE DELIVERY**

The context in a country sets the stage on which sustained and effective water and sanitation services can be developed. Stakeholders are adapting to and influence the context they operate in, and it has major implications on how country and external support agencies promote sustainable and scalable solutions. Influencing what is within reach for stakeholders and adapting to what cannot easily be influenced demands a strategic and dynamic look at WASH service delivery. WASH stakeholders need to address sustainability and efficiency of services as more than a technical challenge.

An all-encompassing definition of Enabling Environment describes the concept as “the set of interrelated conditions that impact on the capacity of...development actors... in a sustained and effective manner” (Thindwa, 2003:4). However, the environment can be more or less conducive towards the desired changes. Focusing further on the potential positive impact on development efforts, a more precise definition of the enabling environment can be “the policy, institutional and financial framework that is necessary for sustaining and replicating large scale...programs” (WSP, 2015)

These frameworks or interrelated conditions are tremendously important for how the WASH service delivery functions. Yet, their constituent parts are not all amenable to be affected by interventions related to WASH. In fact, for an operationalization of a more conducive Enabling Environment for WASH service delivery; these general definitions are not sufficiently specific with regard to what factors of the Enabling Environment can be addressed in the short to medium term, with a sectoral focus.

## **WATER GOVERNANCE IS AT THE HEART OF THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES**

A Political-Economy Analysis approach would suggest that the broader environment for WASH services be considered to consist of two broad categories of factors that each provides positive or negative incentives for performance and change. These categories of factors are referred to as the underlying Structural Factors (or the general context), which are beyond immediate influence of development actors, and the Institutional Factors consisting of the norms, regulations and informal rules that shape the relationship between the actors in the sector (Fritz et al, 2009; Jiménez et al, 2014; OECD, 2011:11).

Water governance has been defined as the set of rules, practices, and processes that determine who gets what water, when and how (Allan, 2001). These rules, practices and processes are continuously (re-) produced through the interactions between actors in the water sector and with their surrounding institutional frameworks and the broader structural conditions.

Figure 1 shows the different categories of factors that directly and indirectly affect WASH service delivery.

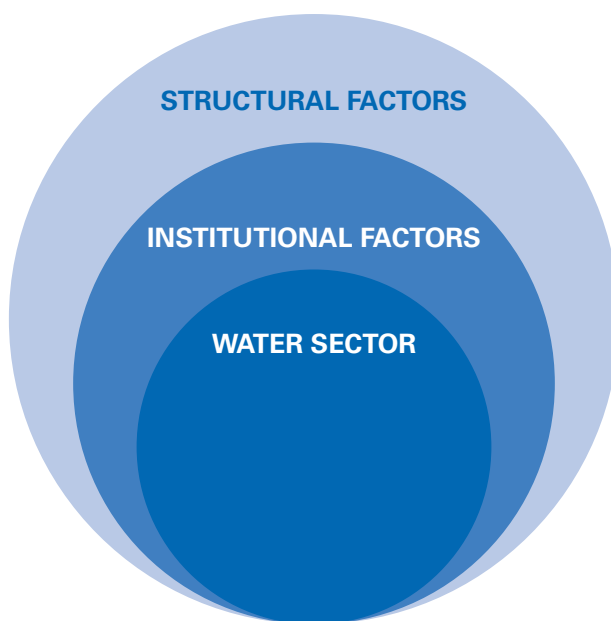


Figure 1. *Layers of structural and institutional factors constituting the enabling environment for WASH services delivery.*

## INFLUENCING THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE CORE WATER GOVERNANCE FUNCTIONS

The main tasks that a line water ministry should undertake in cooperation with other stakeholders to develop an effective sector can be seen as the **core water governance functions**. There is no commonly agreed set of core functions, and they can vary depending on the level of development of the sector and the country context.<sup>1</sup> In the context of WASH in a country with medium to low level of access to services, the following set of core WASH governance functions and definitions are suggested for analyzing and understanding the sector:

- 1. Policy and law making:** include the promulgation of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning WASH. Legal provisions set out compulsory standards, procedures and principles that protect water resources and water rights, and ensure the respect of economic and environmental quality norms. Policy documents outline priorities and the methods and principles used to achieve them. WASH policies provide the framework necessary to deliver WASH services.
- 2. Coordination:** and clarity of roles of different stakeholders. The aim of the coordination function is to promote and ensure cooperation among central, regional and local government departments, between different sectors, with civil society, external support agencies and the private sector providers. Coordination and clarity of roles ensure that there is predictable leadership, coordinated decision-making and accountability in the WASH sector.
- 3. Capacity development:** for the different institutions. A crucial element in good governance of the WASH sector is that the right number of people are equipped with sustained, adequate professional and technical capacity to perform their functions for the delivery of water and sanitation services. A special focus should be given to the need for human resource development to support water and sanitation services at subnational and local levels.
- 4. Planning:** WASH sector plans set the context for the services and support informed decision-making to achieve sustainable and equitable services with the available resources. The planning process includes making decision about priorities but it is also about the process and the level of participation through which those priorities are selected. The planning process also encompasses data collection and analysis, formulation of strategies and allocation of resources.
- 5. Budgeting of water services:** The WASH budget includes the different steps and principles for calculation of costs (capital and operational budgets), the sources of incomes, the allocation of funds for

maintenance and rehabilitation of infrastructures and the approval process and disbursements.

- 6. Monitoring and learning:** Good governance of the WASH sector requires that strong systems are in place for monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The monitoring process goes beyond inventories of access to services, with increased attention being paid to how information about progress is collected, and who is responsible for its publication. Institutional arrangements for analyzing the collected information and acting on the created knowledge are crucial for the learning component.
- 7. Financing:** adequate and sustainable financing is central to achieving universal access for water and sanitation. Resource mobilization for WASH service provision addresses issues of financial viability (how the sector is going to be financed), data gaps (how to account for WASH expenditures), financing structures (how the combination of taxes, transfers and tariffs will be used) and financial management (financial planning, maintaining accounts, reporting, etc.).
- 8. Service delivery arrangements:** the institutional framework for the provision of services determines who has the property of the infrastructure, who can provide the service in different settings (urban, rural, small towns), how contracts are established and reviewed.
- 9. Regulation of services:** regulatory functions, often performed by sector-specific regulatory authorities, involve maintaining a balance between the different interests of users, service providers and government. To achieve this, regulations can incentivize good performance and sanction poor performance, regulate tariffs and ensure users' participation.

All these functions require the interaction between stakeholders in service provision, primarily the government, the service providers and the users of the services. Even in developed economies to get these functions to operate effectively is a challenge; with a concerted effort to improve institutional performance over many years. In developing economies, development partners can play an important role in supporting efforts to fast-track the process of developing and improving the carrying out of these functions. The role of an outside organization can prove catalytic for overcoming vested interests and a lack of trust between stakeholders – matters that constrain the capacity for collective action. Transparency, accountability and participation cut across these functions, and are critical for an improvement of service delivery. Accountability, understood as a way of improving the functional links between the different actors involved in service provision, can be instrumental for improving efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services (UNDP Water Governance Facility / UNICEF, 2015).

<sup>1</sup> For different lists of governance functions, see for example: "Good Governance in the WASH sector, module 3" (IRC 2011), slide 30, or SIWI et al (2013), Users Guide on Assessing Water Governance, Box 2.2.

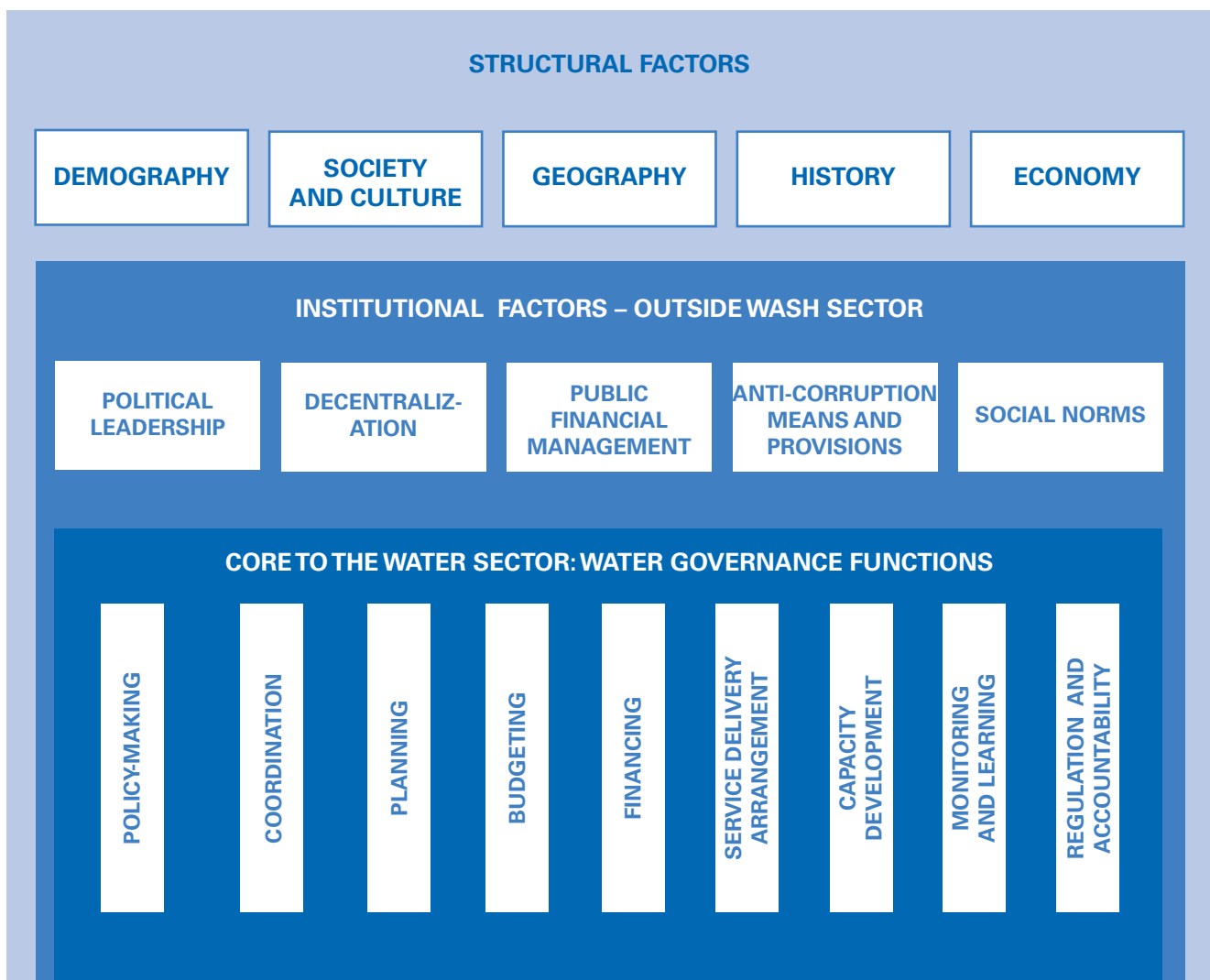
**FOCUSING ON THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT COMPONENTS THAT ARE CORE TO THE WATER SECTOR**

As suggested above, there are many factors beyond the water sector that directly and indirectly affect the sector’s performance. Beyond the underlying structural conditions that constitute demographic, cultural, geographical, historical and economic factors, there are immediate institutional factors relating to the political leadership, policies of decentralization policy (and their implementation), fiscal policies along with means to

control corruption and the norms that guide the interaction around the water sector. These institutional factors have significant and direct impact on WASH service delivery, but most of them fall beyond the control of the WASH sector itself.

Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of how the broader structural and the immediate institutional factors relate to the core governance functions, in a proposed conceptual framework for picturing the Enabling Environment for WASH service delivery.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for enabling environment for sustainable WASH service delivery



**THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK HAS A SERIES OF IMPLICATIONS:**

- Successful WASH interventions must build on a thorough understanding of the underlying drivers and constraints pertaining to the context: What are the influential environmental factors? What is the nature of their impact on WASH conditions and actors?
- Most of the actions that an External Support Agents can undertake will focus on the Enabling Environment components that are core to the water sector. There are, however, actions that address some of the institutional factors falling outside full control of the water sector such as social norms for sanitation and decentralization. In all cases, it is important to fully understand the implications for the WASH sector of the factors affecting its performance.
- Influence can be exerted over institutional factors, that means over the actors and the rules and norms that govern their behavior to each other. For this reason, accountability, as the set of mechanisms that makes actors explain and justify their decisions to each other (UNICEF/WGF, 2015), is considered both as a cross cutting aspect to consider in each water governance function and as a goal in itself, since it will serve as the way to identify weaknesses of the current processes and propose improvements in the Enabling Environment.

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