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**DELIVERING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES
IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT**

**Water, sanitation and hygiene service delivery
in Liberia supports peace and nation building**

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The transition of the WASH Sector in Liberia from a state of total destruction to being firmly on the road to recovery is an interesting story to follow. Liberia's civil war ended ten years ago and since then there has been a remarkable improvement in the country; this improvement is due to the combined efforts of many committed actors and the partnership displayed, in particular in the WASH sector in Liberia, is commendable and worth documenting. Research has shown that the rebuilding of basic services (UN, 2009) such as water and sanitation services, and supporting country led processes (World Bank Group, 2011) such as national planning are of extreme importance in a country's transition from fragile and conflict affected state to development and in peace and nation building.

Introduction

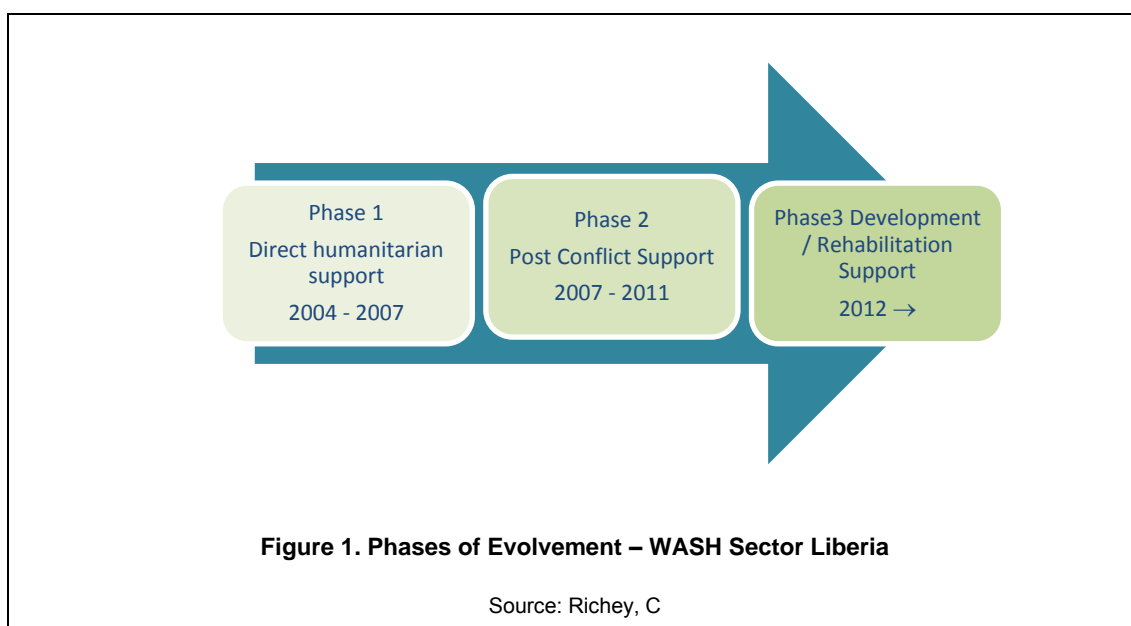
Liberia is a coastal country in West Africa that is bordered by Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea. The population is 3,478,608 (Government of Liberia, 2008) with an urban: rural ratio of 47 - 53% respectively. For twenty four years, from 1979 – 2003, Liberia was in a state of civil crisis. Fourteen of these years included periods of full blown civil war which claimed the lives of almost 250,000 people and destroyed the majority of the infrastructure in the country. The war finally ended in mid 2003 with a peace agreement signed and a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) established.

The NTGL steered the country towards elections and in November 2005 Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected as President of the Republic of Liberia. The work of rebuilding the country started and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) provision, as a basic service, was of critical importance in this process. In 2003 access to clean water was 17% and access to safe sanitation a dismal 7%. (Government of Liberia, 2008) To rebuild the country, and provide basic services the government had to start almost from scratch as the entire governance system of Liberia was in turmoil; not least in this was the governance of the WASH sector. If data from the recent Agenda for Transformation is used then the situation with regards to water has greatly improved with access cited as 62%, however the situation regarding sanitation remains dire with access at only 25% (Government of Liberia, 2012).

This paper will present the chronological evolution of the WASH sector in Liberia, focusing on the critical milestones that have supported institutional reform and supported the process of moving towards a country led strategy. The example of Liberia will be used to demonstrate how it is possible to move from upstream analytical work, such as advocacy orientated reports and base line data collection, to downstream funding mobilisation and investment.

Critical milestones

The evolution of the Liberia WASH sector can be described under three main phases.



Phase one

Phase One was characterised by humanitarian efforts that started shortly after the peace accord was signed in August 2003. Rapid needs assessments were undertaken and interventions started in earnest in early 2004. The purpose of the interventions was twofold; to meet the humanitarian imperative of providing safe water, and to support the process of enabling internally displaced people and refugees to start returning home. As a result projects tended to be quick impact focused and implemented by UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNMIL and UNICEF, ICRC and MSF-B were present and INGOs such as ACF, Oxfam, and Concern Worldwide were mobilising.

The nature of quick impact projects is that they are exactly that – quick impact. Very limited effort was put into sustainability, and interventions consisted of predominantly hand dug wells and pit latrines constructed for communities by the implementer. Hygiene promotion was rarely undertaken neither were any form of community water committees or pump mechanic training etc. This period simply served the purpose of getting clean water and sanitation into communities to help people, who had become used to these facilities from either living in IDP camps or in neighbouring countries where standards were higher, and to attract them to return home. Consequently the work that was done did not last. A Water Atlas developed in 2011 by the Ministry of Public Works in partnership with donors and NGOs showed that the total number of improved waterpoints in Liberia is just above 10,000. Of these 6,371 (63.7%) are technically fully functional, 1,098 (11%) are functional but with problems and 2,532 (25%) have been classified as broken down systems (WSP, 2011). 2006 ushered in a shift in intervention strategy with interventions starting to take on a different, longer term view.

Phase two

Phase Two built directly on the humanitarian interventions discussed above and more developmentally orientated interventions got underway. Agencies began setting up and working with community water committees, community health volunteers and started training pump mechanics. Spare parts dealerships began to slowly emerge and even though there were still a myriad of challenges things had definitely moved on from the quick impact phase.

Alongside these practical community level capacity building exercises, agencies started working with government and local NGOs. WASH governance in Liberia is split between a number of line ministries each with their own mandate. The Ministry of Lands Mines and Energy (MLME) is responsible for chemical water testing and had the mandate for sector governance, the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) is responsible for rural hardware implementation, the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation (LWSC) responsible for urban hardware and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOH) is responsible for software (hygiene promotion) and bacteriological water quality testing. Whilst this comes across relatively clearly on paper, in reality the sector was totally uncoordinated, leadership capacity very weak and

ministries under resourced. Local NGOs and contractors existed but faced the same capacity conundrum and resource challenges as government. WASH was not on the local civil society organisations agenda, and as such sector advocacy was driven by INGOs such as Oxfam.

To support the government in overcoming some of the above challenges, donors and NGOs started trying to work increasingly with government systems or transitional models for aid delivery. A good example of this was the Liberia WASH Consortium. The Consortium, which is made up of ACF, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Solidarites International and Tearfund, had a three pillared strategy which included direct implementation, capacity building of local actors and advocating for sector investment. The capacity building element of the strategy involved each implementing consortium member partnering with a local NGO to train them and Oxfam partnering with the Ministry of Health to train County Health Teams and Environment Health Technicians. The Advocacy arm of the Consortium worked with civil society organisations and in June 2009 the WASH Working Group was launched with the Corina Declaration. Supported by WaterAid, this group then went on to establish the WASH Reporters & Editors Network in late 2010. The Consortium received primary funding from DFID which was shortly followed by funding from the World Bank, ECHO and Irish Aid.

During this phase two UNICEF worked with government to produce two policies for the sector; the Water Supply and Sanitation Policy and the Integrated Water Resource Management Policy. The support from UNICEF was practical and effective; a consultant was hired who worked with a small taskforce to produce draft policies. These were then circulated to the broader sector for comments and feedback which was then applied. Both these policies were adopted by government in early 2009. Unfortunately though, these policies once developed, were not implemented. In 2010 in order to both prompt policy implementation, and raise awareness regarding the inadequate access to WASH services in Liberia, the Consortium wrote an advocacy paper entitled Life and Dignity at Risk -The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector in Liberia.

This paper identified the problem areas in the sector and made some key recommendations. Of which the main two were that government needed to speed up the process of formulating and operationalising policy instruments and plans; including the sector strategic plan, and that a comprehensive nationwide assessment of water and sanitation facilities was needed in order to provide accurate baseline data for the sector (Sitali, 2009).

At the invitation of the MLME, UNDP Country Office and the Consortium, UNDP GoAL WASH undertook a scoping study in April 2010 and produced a project options report that provided macro detail for two projects in Liberia. Project A was for High Level Support for the Water Supply and Sanitation Commission (Liberia’s WASH Regulatory Agency) and Project B was to Build an Effective Database for Planning for Progress towards the MDGs 2015. UNDP was not in a position to fund both projects and an agreement was reached with the World Banks Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) that UNDP would partner with the MLME on Project A and that WSP would partner with MPW and UNICEF for Project B.

Project B became commonly known as the Water Point Mapping project; it started in late 2009 and by August 2011 a Water Atlas had been produced. Project A – the WASH



Photograph 1. Pump mechanic training in Sinoe County

Source: Tearfund 2007

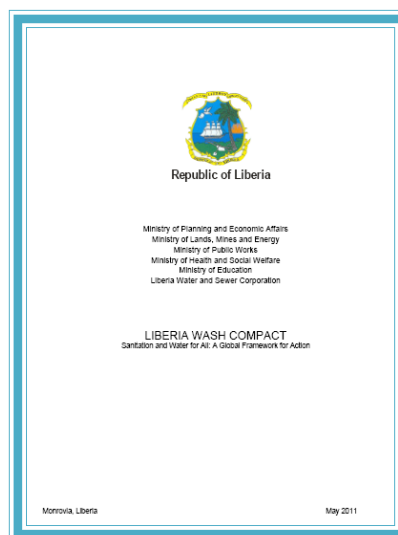


Figure 2. WEDC – Cover Liberia WASH Compact

Source: Government of Liberia

governance project started in February 2011, straight into the planning for the Liberia WASH Compact Joint Mission.

The Liberia WASH Compact is indisputably the most crucial development of the post conflict period and has become the main driver of country led sector reform. The idea for the Compact was initiated by the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership and embraced by the Government of Liberia.

In February 2011 Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, invited Development Partners from around the world to participate in a Joint Mission in Liberia that also included sector stakeholders from government, civil society and the private sector. Supported by SWA, a statement of work was produced and planning for the mission was led by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. After 2 months of robust planning the joint mission was held and the Liberia WASH Compact was produced. The four key commitments of the Compact are to:

1. **Establish and strengthen institutional capacity**
2. **Ensure equity and prioritized service provision**
3. **Develop a monitoring system**
4. **Improve sector financing mechanisms**



Photograph 2. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and other dignitaries launch the Liberia WASH Compact

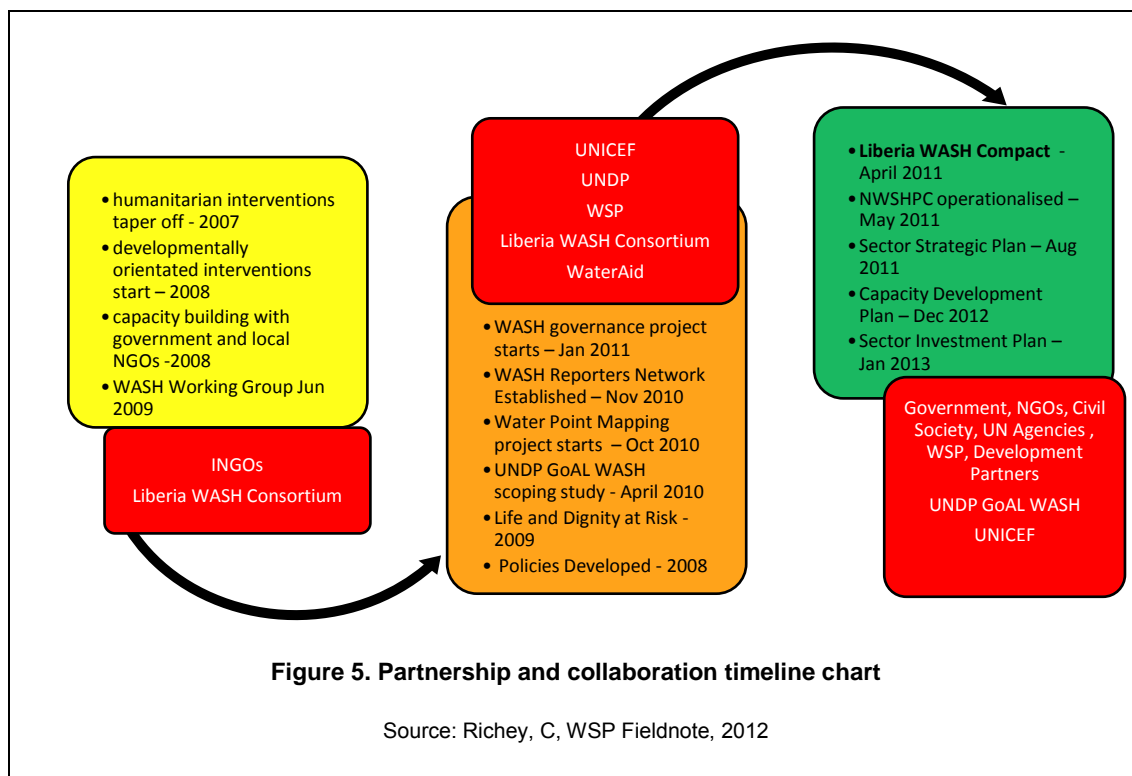
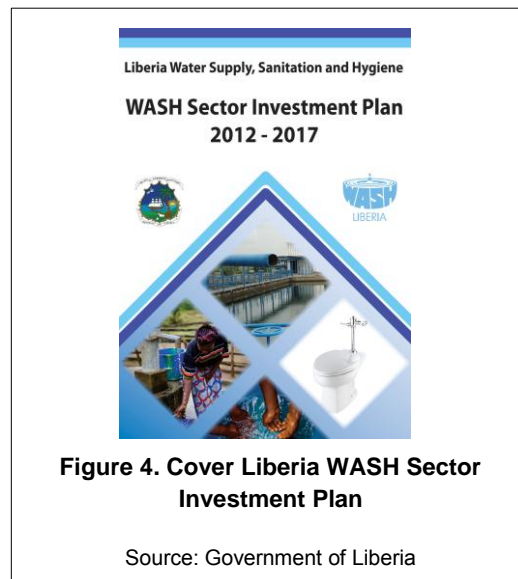
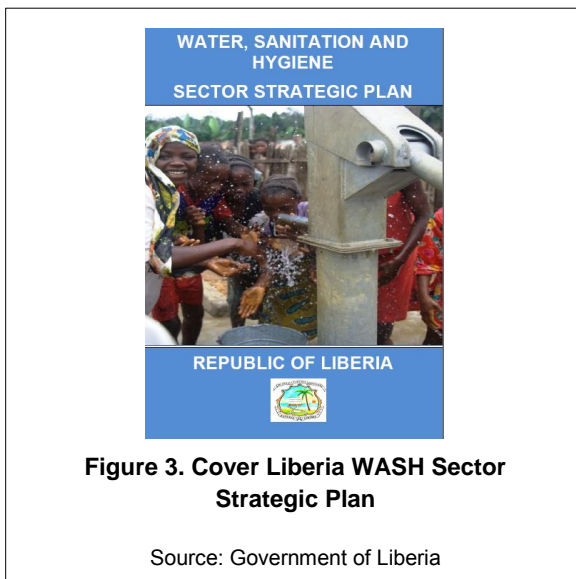
Source: Liberia WASH Consortium

As one of the principle actions of the Compact deliverables under commitment number 1 the National Water Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Committee (NWSHPC), comprised of technical experts representing WASH stakeholders in government, the UN and civil society, was operationalised. This happened immediately after the joint mission, with the Ministry of Public Works simply calling a committee meeting for the week following the mission. The NWSHPC rapidly became the driving force in the sector and has recently been institutionalised by government with MPW appointing a National Coordinator and providing a vehicle for the committee. During the course of 2011 the NWSHPC met twice per month and as of 2012 this has been revised to monthly meetings. The agenda for meetings is set annually and is aligned with the activities sited in the Compact thus managing the delivery of the Compact commitments.

These commitments have become the key objectives that all national planning is being based off and in August 2011 the Sector Strategic Plan (SSP) was finally completed again supported practically by UNICEF hiring a consultant to work with a local taskforce to pull the SSP together. Furthermore the commitments informed the WASH component of both the Agenda for Transformation (Poverty Reduction Strategy II) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

Between July and October 2012 a capacity development needs assessment was undertaken that identified the existing capacity assets (capacity strengths) and the capacities needed for sector stakeholders to be able to undertake their sectoral responsibilities, which enabled the capacity gaps to be determined. The recommendations were then established through analysis of the gaps and the capacity development needs

identified by the key ministries and agencies. This process was supported by UNICEF and in December 2012 a Capacity Development Plan (CDP) was finalised. January 2013 saw the conclusion of the development of a Sector Investment Plan (SIP). The development of the SIP which was officially launched by the Vice President for Liberia H.E. Joseph Nyumah Boakai on 7 February 2013 was supported by WSP and commenced in May 2012. The SIP is a key tool for the WASH sector to complete the shift from phase one to phase three by providing details on the need for rehabilitation of existing, and the expansion of water and sanitation infrastructure.



The above events under phase two of Liberia’s WASH sector evolution combine to pave the way for moving from information to investment and can be neatly depicted in the following timeline chart which also shows in the red blocks who the champions were at each stage. This is interesting as it clearly

demonstrates how strong collaboration and partnership is in the WASH sector in Liberia, and how a group of many, working towards one agenda – that of improved access to WASH services – can bring about sustainable change.

Phase three

The significant amount of information garnered during the above phase put the building blocks in place for Phase Three which is really all about translating this information into implementation

AfDB is currently working in urban Liberia financing WSS in Monrovia, Kakata, Zwedru and Buchanan under their four cities project with LWSC. AfDB is also due to fund a study that will develop a detailed Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Plan which should flow into implementation and will fund Fostering Innovative Sanitation and Hygiene (FISH) in Monrovia which is an innovative project involving faecal sludge removal. USAID is funding the development of project plans for WSS in Saniquelle, Voinjama and Robertspport and these plans will flow into implementation in these cities. DFID will fund implementation in the eastern part of the country starting in April 2013 and the Dutch Government will fund a five year WASH project spanning the country. Sector investment has thus slightly improved over the past two years, however the needs remain immense and on-going investment is required in Liberia. In particular there needs to be an emphasis on sanitation and small town piped water systems.

Conclusion

Supporting the development of country led strategies is of crucial importance for a fragile or conflicted state and it is proven (World Bank Group, 2011) that buy-in to this process by all stakeholders is vital. Lessons for the WASH Sector, particularly in Fragile States, are that in the case of Liberia there were, and still are, many stakeholders involved in the development of the above tools and in implementation; however it was only really when the Liberia WASH Compact was developed that the development of the sector became truly country led. Partnership and collaboration worked well and positive results are visible as is evidenced by access to water having increased from 25% (Government of Liberia, 2008) in 2006 to 62% in 2012 (Government of Liberia, 2012).

Acknowledgements

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Note/s

Information for this paper is sourced in majority from grey literature on file with the author.

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