Third Party Monitoring of WASH in Pakistan

SUMMARY

UNICEF Pakistan has established a third party WASH monitoring system which delivers reliable and timely information on the progress of projects implemented by a range of implementing partners whose own monitoring capacity varies significantly.

The consistency of system is helpful in establishing efficient monitoring and reporting routines based on a monthly cycle of activities which is understood by all stakeholders. It includes a feedback mechanism whereby the monitoring agency informs IPs of any performance gaps identified during the previous month’s activities.

Introduction

UNICEF Pakistan first introduced third party WASH monitoring in 2012 via the RuSFAD (Rural Sanitation in Flood-affected Districts) programme launched after the 2010 flood emergency. Monitoring was a challenge due to the scale and geographical spread of activities and because some locations were difficult to reach and/or subject to security restrictions that made it difficult for UN staff to visit.

Outsourcing enabled UNICEF to bring in additional human resources, and a local private company would not be subject to the security restrictions affecting UN staff. Many of these challenges also apply to development programmes and today UNICEF programmes across all sectors in Pakistan have some degree of third party monitoring, partly for the reasons above but also to enhance transparency in reporting.

When UNICEF introduced Third Party Field Monitoring (TPFM) in 2012, the role was initially assigned to the INGO WaterAid along with responsibility for knowledge management. WaterAid in turn sub-contracted a private firm, APEX Consulting to undertake the field work.

The first TPFM system was based around five standard reporting forms covering outputs, a narrative, 28 indicators (none on processes), disease surveillance and ODF verification. In the absence of process indicators, monitors used their own judgment on whether processes were adequate and reported accordingly.

TPFM under RuSFAD cost around 10% of the programme total – a substantial amount. An end of programme review found that the system had tried to measure too many things, while the use of multiple Results Frameworks (one per IP) complicated contracting, monitoring and data aggregation.
When RuSFAD ended in 2013, lessons from the evaluation were used to redesign UNICEF’s national sanitation programme, which was re-launched the same year as the Sanitation Programme at Scale in Pakistan (SPSP). For the redesigned programme, UNICEF took back responsibility for knowledge management and contracted APEX directly for TPFM. At this point they standardised the implementation model and associated indicators, which is now covering both processes and outputs.

**Description of Intervention**

The current framework for field-based monitoring is a standard multi-step implementation process which is followed by all implementing partners; these include 14 (mostly national) NGOs. The process includes a Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) package based on four campaigns per year; UNICEF provides customised IEC materials for each one.

A set of 46 indicators is used for monitoring both processes and outputs. Initially the indicator set was much larger than that used by the IPs, but the two were later harmonised.

APEX is a large company with offices across Pakistan, and is the sole TPFM agency for the SPSP. Use of a single contractor helps to ensure a consistent approach and minimises the management burden on UNICEF. In each province where the programme operates, APEX deploys a Field Coordinator, a Technical Team and a number of field monitors - typically two (one male, one female) but this depends on the size of the target population and local geography. APEX’s role is limited to monitoring field-based activities; the programme also has objectives at policy and institutional level, but these are monitored by UNICEF and government partners.

The TPFM role is highly structured and includes a programme of monthly field visits to observe implementing partners at work. The type and frequency of visits made to each partner depends primarily on a risk assessment made at programme start; typically around 20% of key activities are observed directly but as much as 80% for a high risk partner; see Box 1. Each Field Monitor normally makes 20 monitoring visits per district per month and generates 40 reports.

At the start of every month, each IP prepares a work plan and shares it with APEX, who use it as the basis for planning their monitoring visits. These fall into four categories:

- **Planned visits.** These are scheduled in response to the work plans submitted by the IPs, and timed to coincide with specific activities.
- **Validation visits.** These are conducted to check information provided by the IPs.
- **Unscheduled visits.** A number of these are made to ensure that TPFM gets to see activities for which no special preparation has been made by the IPs or community.
- **Follow-up visits.** These are conducted to check whether corrective action has been taken to address issues raised in monthly review meetings between the TPFM, IP and UNICEF.

After observing an activity (for example, CLTS triggering or a hygiene promotion session) the Field Monitor records comments on the quality of delivery based on defined criteria, and ranks the activity using a simple traffic light system (red, amber, green). Similarly, when inspecting physical outputs such as latrines or water points, this is done using a standard checklist. Monitors also take photographs where appropriate and record GPS co-ordinates, except in places subject to security restrictions.

**KEY POINTS**

- The third party agency monitors not only outputs but the quality of implementation processes.
- Fundamental to this system is the standardisation across all IPs of the implementation process, monitoring indicators and monitoring agency tasks.
- IP learning to improve the effectiveness of programme delivery is integral to the system.
- The third party role extends to monitoring field work by UNICEF’s key government partner.
Hand written field data is later recorded in prescribed form in Excel and Word formats, and once checked at provincial level is entered into the APEX online database held on Google drive. This enables data to be accessed at provincial and national level, and is made accessible to UNICEF following quality assurance checks.

The role of the third party agency extends to validating ODF certification reports, even though certification is itself an independent process led by a district-based team of government officers.

A monthly cycle is in place for reporting and reviewing progress; see Figure 1. A deadline is set for the IP to submit its monthly report to the UNICEF provincial office, for which a standard proforma is normally used, developed by UNICEF. The report is copied to APEX whose staff add further information from their own monitoring and produce a consolidated progress report which is also submitted to UNICEF at provincial and national level, with a copy to APEX national office. UNICEF management, WASH team and Planning, Monitoring and Reporting (PMER) units at federal and provincial level receive the TPFM month report simultaneously.

Roughly two weeks after receiving the consolidated report, a UNICEF provincial WASH Officer chairs a meeting with APEX and IPs at which APEX staff present their findings and highlight any corrective action needed. Action points are then agreed and Field Monitors make follow-up visits the next month to ensure that corrective action has been taken. UNICEF provincial staff also make field visits (typically two per partner per quarter) to check progress on the ground and oversee the activities of both IPs and APEX.
Figure 1. Monthly cycle of monitoring, reporting and corrective action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IP</th>
<th>Share workplan with TPFM</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Monthly report to UNICEF, cc TPFM</th>
<th>Share workplan with TPFM</th>
<th>Implementation and corrective action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TPFM</td>
<td>Prepare monthly monitoring schedule</td>
<td>Monitoring visits</td>
<td>Consolidated progress report to UNICEF</td>
<td>Prepare monthly monitoring schedule</td>
<td>Monitoring, checking corrective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review meeting with TPFM, IPs, corrective action agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Key activities monitored

1. Selection of most vulnerable families through participatory rural appraisal and development of Community Action Plan.
3. Trainings.
5. WASH in Schools.
6. Material support for latrine construction to extremely vulnerable families, through market based voucher system.
7. Construction of School WASH facilities.
8. Identification of sanitation mart and sanitation enterprises.
10. Achievement of Open Defecation Free status.
11. Construction of community infrastructure as reward.

Figure 2. Tracking corrective action. Taken from a TPFM report, this pie chart format was used to track both the nature and severity of corrective action required, and the actual action taken. In this case it summarised corrective action across the entire programme over a ten month period.
Outcomes

Having fine-tuned the TPFM system over the four years since its introduction, UNICEF now receive timely and credible information on the progress of supported projects. The benefits go beyond simply measuring outputs, however, because there is a mechanism for feedback and corrective action to resolve any problems identified. In this way TPFM facilitates quality assurance of implementation processes, and learning for IPs.

As an example of corrective action, on one occasion the monitoring agency found that a number of villages in one district had been certified as ODF but in reality did not meet the criteria. While it was regrettable for this to have happened, it was picked up by TPFM and steps were taken to ensure that the verification process was repeated with due attention to agreed ODF criteria.

Inevitably it took time to reach the point where the monthly cycle of monitoring and reporting was operating efficiently, but this has now been achieved for all of the IPs. Some explanation of the monitoring agency's role was needed at the outset as some community members were unsure as to who the monitors were. Once this was explained by the IP, however, their role was accepted. An additional benefit of TPFM is that it forces IPs to plan efficiently, since they have to share their work plans with the monitoring agency every month.

It should be acknowledged that not every component of TPFM has proved to be useful. A case in point is the monthly collection of morbidity data from government rural health centres in project locations. The original intention was to look for an association between WASH improvements and the incidence of water and sanitation-related disease. This is notoriously difficult to do, however, apart from which there are serious doubts in this case about the reliability of the morbidity data available. To date no use has been found for the data and this activity may therefore be dropped from future contracts.

Lessons Learned

For other organisations considering whether and how to introduce third party monitoring for WASH programmes, experience from Pakistan provides some valuable lessons. Three critical questions are considered here.

**Under what circumstances is TPFM most appropriate and useful? When is it less useful?**

UNICEF now use TPFM for all of their larger programmes in Pakistan - not just WASH. It was introduced partly to improve transparency and to circumvent security restrictions on the movement of UN staff, but was also a logical response to human resource constraints within UNICEF at both national and provincial level.

For the WASH programme, it is significant that SPSP is primarily concerned with promoting an end to open defecation and the adoption of hand washing with soap. Success in changing behaviour is known to be very process dependent and it is difficult to monitor these processes adequately via occasional short field visits, which may be all that UNICEF programme staff could manage. There are, therefore, clear advantages in being able to hire full-time monitors who deploy to the programme districts, provided that the essential level of independence from IPs can be maintained. Programmes with a stronger focus on hardware or for which the results are less process dependent may not need such a high degree of direct observation. An example might be the provision of subsidised house connections to the public water supply network in slums.

The capacity of implementing partners is another factor to consider. In this case most are local NGOs and some have limitations in terms of WASH experience or organisational and monitoring capacity; sometimes working with such partners unavoidable in important but high risk locations. Where the partners have a strong track record in the sector and their monitoring systems are found to be of a high quality (as with some INGOs), there may be less need for TPFM - or at least it could be more 'light touch'.

Lastly, while there may be a strong case for the independent monitoring of projects implemented by government partners, funding agencies have much less influence over programme delivery than they do with NGOs or private contractors,
and the scope for TPFM depends largely on government acceptance of the arrangement. In Pakistan, the PHEDs have proved open to some level of independent scrutiny, and around 5% of key activities are observed compared to 20% (on average) for NGOs. Moreover, it is very encouraging that in Panjab Province PHED has hired APEX to monitor its own sanitation programme, funded from public sources.

**What are the requirements effective third party monitoring?**

A key enabling factor in this case was the adoption of a standard, clearly defined, implementation model with associated indicators designed for measuring not only outputs (hard and soft) but also the quality of the processes by which the outputs are delivered. Furthermore there is a common understanding among UNICEF, IPs and the monitoring agency of how the system works and what each of them is expected to do. Getting this right took time but the investment in establishing and fine tuning the system has paid off.

Another strength of the system is that it directly links monitoring to operational planning and requirements for corrective action. The need to report regularly and accurately, and generally to co-operate with the monitors, is therefore well understood by IPs. It is also to the credit of the monitoring agency that is has managed to establish a positive working relationship with IPs whereby it is viewed more as a critical friend than as a policeman.

The technical capacity of the monitoring personnel is a further consideration. Field Monitors play a critical role and UNICEF’s contract with APEX specifies minimum qualifications; amongst other things monitors are expected to be graduates while for the technical team, which monitors hardware aspects of the programme, the qualification of Associate Engineer is accepted given that only simple technology is involved. APEX itself is a private consulting firm which works on development programmes in a number of sectors and hence has not only technical expertise but is familiar with the operating context and with NGOs, which helps it to engage effectively with the partners.

The cost of monitoring is of course a fundamental concern for both funders and implementing agencies. While TPFM accounted for around 10% of programme costs under RuSFAD, standardising the implementation and monitoring framework across all partners, along with other operational improvements over time, has delivered efficiencies which have brought the cost down to around 3.5% of the programme total - close to typical monitoring budgets for WASH programmes even without third party involvement. The total amount is, nevertheless, substantial and UNICEF are exploring options to streamline systems further to help reduce costs without compromising on monitoring quality.

**What are the limitations of TPFM?**

While TPFM helps to improve implementation processes (for example, by forcing IPs to plan effectively) it does not necessarily strengthen the IPs’ own monitoring capacity though in this case UNICEF encourages and supports peer learning amongst the IPs and the training of IP monitors. Some partner NGOs are much weaker than others and struggle with the design and implementation of baseline studies, the compilation of community profiles against which progress in each household is measured, and data management generally. It is beyond APEX’s remit to develop the monitoring capacity of IPs; instead their presence compensates for these capacity gaps.
Next Steps

UNICEF Pakistan has found third party monitoring to be a valuable component of their WASH programme and intend to continue the practice. It must remain affordable, however, and to this end the WASH team is now looking for opportunities to reduce costs without compromising on monitoring quality. Two possibilities are currently under consideration.

Firstly, the 46 process and output indicators have been reviewed and there are evidently opportunities for streamlining the set to reduce instances of overlap or duplication. Using a smaller number of indicators would reduce the reporting and data management burden for all parties. Secondly, it might be possible to revise the focus and scope of the TPFM agency’s role so that there is more emphasis on strengthening and quality assuring the IPs’ own monitoring and reporting systems. This could include support to the design and implementation of baseline studies and the compilation of community profiles, and to data management generally. Were this to be done then it should become possible eventually to reduce the amount of time spent on direct observation of IP activities in the field, though the proportion of unannounced visits could perhaps be increased.
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About the Series

UNICEF’s water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of best practice across the UNICEF’s WASH programming. The documents in this series include:

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