

Practical advice on supporting government systems – As learned from strengthening Malawi’s Water SWAp



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What is the day-to-day work of systems strengthening?

From 2014 to 2016, WASH Catalysts supported the advancement of Malawi’s Water Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp), from embedded positioning within the Ministry of Water. After several years with very little progress, significant developments towards the SWAp were finally achieved, resulting in a stronger and more coordinated sector. Some of the tactics and approaches used by the team to support the strengthening of this system are described here for the consideration of others seeking to support the development of country systems.

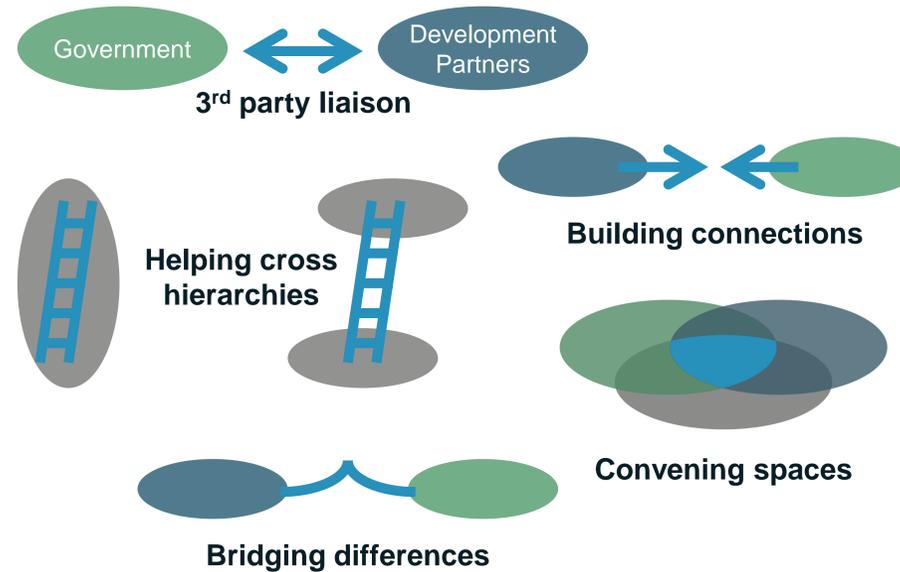
Building & maintaining momentum for change

Malawi’s Water SWAp had been initiated in 2008, but for several years there had been little progress. Development Partners and Government alike were frustrated and questioned commitment to actually having a developed SWAp.

- Identified “quick wins” to tackle first, and major achievements to show substantial progress
- Linked small steps and changes to the broader context
- Created spaces to discuss progress and challenges openly and made adjustments where needed
- Established broad and multi-layered relationships, participation, and buy-in to mitigate for transitions and demonstrate commitment

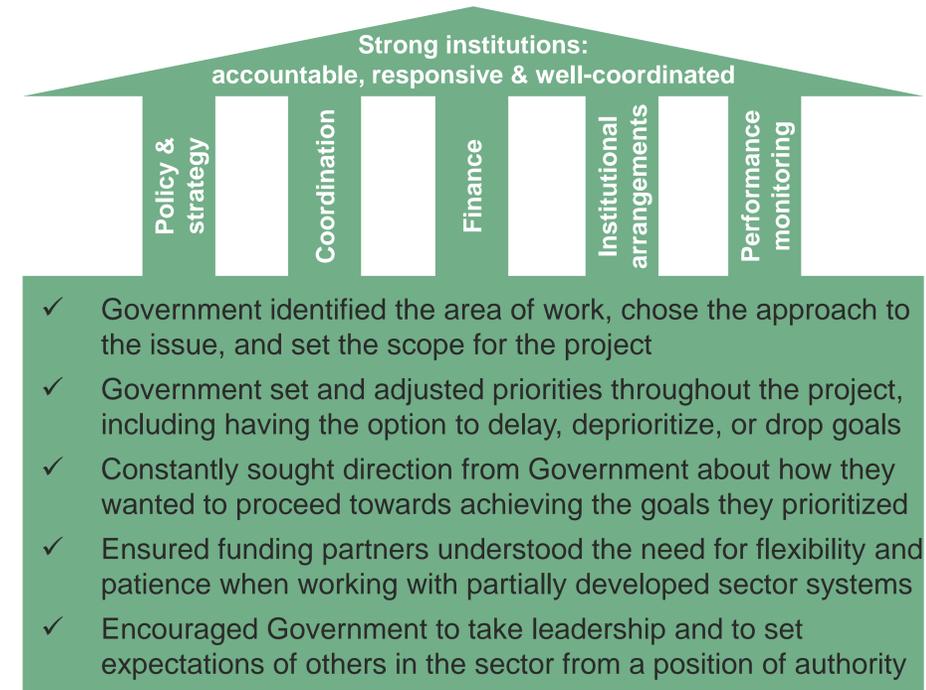
Opening communication

Developing systems for sector coordination requires coordination! Where these spaces and norms were still in development, WASH Catalysts facilitated connections to help the sector make progress.



Project reinforcement of Government’s leadership role

WASH Catalysts wanted to ensure this project would reinforce government’s leadership role in the sector, not only by directly building this, but also by ensuring government leadership of the project.



Directly helping to build sector systems

The Ministry of Water was stretched to its limits, even before working to develop the SWAp. WASH Catalysts’ support helped the Ministry to develop processes and practices for SWAp, and build capacity to put these into practice.

- ❑ Prepared very rough drafts of key change documents offering others something to build from in articulating their direction and decisions
- ❑ Framed questions for decisions and scoped discussions that needed to happen among sector actors
- ❑ Mapped out steps and key changes involved in the adoption of new sector processes
- ❑ Gathered information to help decision-makers have the facts needed to proceed
- ❑ Balanced direct work with advising and coaching others through processes of creating change

A “Sector-Wide Approach” is a governance approach which aims to:

- Strengthen and simplify government-DP relations
- Broaden government ownership of the sector’s development results
- Improve efficiency by unifying sector planning, management, monitoring, and reporting

WASH Catalysts, a venture of Engineers Without Borders Canada, is tackling governance challenges in Malawi’s rural water supply sector. We are working to shift services from projectized approaches towards a sustainable service delivery model.