






Assessing mutual accountability to strengthen national WASH systems and achieve the SDG targets for water and sanitation

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ABSTRACT

Multi-stakeholder engagement is critical for making progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 'Ensure access to water and sanitation for all', which is currently off track to be achieved by 2030. The aim of this paper was to investigate mutual accountability and multi-stakeholder platforms in the WASH sector in a diverse range of countries. Data were collected by Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Research and Learning Constituency partners and collaborators in five SWA member countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru and Somalia. Data collection involved document review, key informant interviews and workshops, and an online questionnaire. Across all the case study countries, there were no clear examples of mutual accountability mechanisms being widely used in the WASH sector. However, the findings indicate that some of the case study countries have active WASH multi-stakeholder platforms involving a range of actors from government, civil society and the private sector; however, these typically function as coordination and communication platforms rather than supporting mutual accountability. Other case study countries did not have multi-stakeholder platforms involving a diverse range of actors, and instead had platforms established for single stakeholder groups such as the private sector or civil society, leaving certain groups out of activities. Overall, the study highlights the importance of establishing strong multi-stakeholder processes and platforms that bring together a range of actors including government, civil society, private sector, research actors, and WASH external support organizations. Such platforms could provide a foundation to enable mutual accountability between these actors by providing a space to set commitments and monitor progress and have potential to strengthen WASH systems both nationally and globally.

Key words: accountability, governance, multi-stakeholder partnerships, sanitation, water

HIGHLIGHTS

- No examples of mutual accountability were found in the case study countries.
- Where active, multi-stakeholder platforms in the WASH sector typically function as coordination and communication platforms rather than for mutual accountability.
- Multi-stakeholder platforms could enable mutual accountability between actors by providing a space to set commitments and monitor progress.

INTRODUCTION

Multi-stakeholder engagement is critical for making progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 to 'Ensure access to water and sanitation for all', which is currently off track to be achieved by 2030. Recent projections show that quadrupling the current rate of progress would be needed to achieve SDG 6 by 2030 (WHO and UNICEF 2021). A key part of the SDG Agenda is participatory multi-stakeholder processes, and

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SDG 17 includes a number of targets that aim to support achievement of the other SDGs through a multi-stakeholder approach. Target 6.b for water and sanitation focuses on ‘the participation of local communities in water and sanitation planning and management’. More broadly, target 17.16 aims to ‘Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries’. This depends on increased international cooperation as well as strong partnership processes between different stakeholders and political will at a national level (Maltais *et al.* 2018). Effective mutual accountability, or accountability between stakeholders, is critical for driving multi-stakeholder action on SDG 6 with its targets on access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Mutual accountability refers to the ways that partners work together to build transparent and robust systems to hold each other to account (Ulimwengu *et al.* 2020; Willetts *et al.* 2020). Mutual accountability is one of several forms of accountability and draws on multi-stakeholder platforms and processes. A recent review of accountability in a WASH context found the need to further develop and invest in accountability and advocacy interventions in the sector (Hepworth *et al.* 2020). This is particularly needed in the case of mutual accountability in WASH systems, which has been under-researched compared with other forms of accountability.

To advance mutual accountability in the WASH sector, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), a global multi-stakeholder partnership, developed a Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM) in 2018. The SWA MAM is intended to support partners to make commitments and hold each other accountable for progress towards the SDG targets, as well as reinforce country-level multi-stakeholder planning and review processes. However, to date, there is limited evidence on the extent of uptake of mutual accountability using the MAM or other tools, or the underlying multi-stakeholder processes that may enable or hinder mutual accountability. The aim of this paper was to investigate mutual accountability and multi-stakeholder processes in the WASH sector in a diverse range of selected countries.

Background: different forms of accountability in the WASH sector

Accountability is a complex idea which can be conceptualized in different ways but often involves elements of answerability and sanctions (Schedler 1999; Fox 2015). Hepworth *et al.* (2020) describe accountability in the water sector as a five-step cycle that includes rules, fulfilment of responsibilities, reporting, review of performance and effective reactions. We describe several forms of accountability that are applied in the WASH sector, including mutual accountability, which has received less attention.

One of the most common framings examines accountability between duty bearer and rights holder, sometimes referred to as vertical accountability (Mainwaring & Welna 2003). This is also the form of accountability referenced by the human right to water and sanitation, which includes aspects of responsibility, answerability and enforceability. For instance, in the context of WASH, governments are responsible for providing safe water and sanitation services for their citizens, so may monitor service provider compliance towards prevailing laws and regulations (Hofstetter *et al.* 2020). The Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) is a UN Water report that provides insights on accountability in this regard using a survey distributed to national governments report on progress and challenges in WASH service delivery. Although GLAAS does not directly measure accountability, data include related information such as the existence of a formal mechanism exist to coordinate the work of different organizations with responsibilities for WASH, public provision of performance (e.g. quality of service) and customer satisfaction information, and procedures in laws or policies for participation by service users (e.g. households) and communities in planning services. Using GLAAS data, Jiménez *et al.* (2018) identified a number of ways to strengthen accountability such as improving access to information on the services provided, enacting participation policies and increasing the capacity of regulatory institutions. The UN Special Rapporteur has also collected country examples of accountability mechanisms in the WASH sector, such as processes of participation, monitoring, judicial and quasi-judicial, and political mechanisms (Heller 2018). Social accountability is a related process, whereby civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens directly hold public officials and decision-makers accountable for their actions through direct engagement, dialogue and advocacy (UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility & UNICEF 2015). This can include the use of mechanisms such as citizen report cards and social audits (Jiménez *et al.* 2018).

A framing of accountability that is less common in the WASH sector is mutual accountability. Mutual accountability can be described as the process by which two (or multiple) partners hold each other accountable for the commitments they have voluntarily made to each other (Droop *et al.* 2008) and has emerged in response to power

imbalance reflected in vertical models of accountability (Steer *et al.* 2009). It seeks to establish a more balanced partnership between stakeholders through shared commitments, agendas, values and ownership by establishing trust and understanding and working towards the achievement of shared objectives (Ulimwengu *et al.* 2020). For instance, relationships between donors and partner countries are often uneven, but mutual accountability suggests that all stakeholders must hold themselves and others accountable for development processes to succeed. Mutual accountability can also complement and support other types of accountability, including forms of vertical accountability (Willets *et al.* 2020). For example, it can provide a tool to align limited resources in multi-stakeholder contexts to improve the efficiency of their use (Ulimwengu *et al.* 2020).

Accountability is an essential and fundamental concept in the WASH sector for several reasons. Firstly, it is a human rights principle and required for realization of the human right to water and sanitation. States, as duty bearers, are accountable for the WASH policy decisions and actions they make. Secondly, accountability is a key mechanism to strengthen WASH systems, though it is given scant or no mention in WASH systems strengthening academic literature to date (Hollander *et al.* 2020; Valcourt *et al.* 2020a, 2020b). Grey literature does make mention of it however, for instance. Gensch & Tillett (2019) mention accountability in relation to inclusive planning and also include a WASH system's building block titled 'regulation and accountability'. Huston & Moriarty (2018) refer to accountability in their Working Paper on WASH system building blocks, but with a limited scope focused on accountability of service providers. SWA includes a potentially broader scope in their WASH system building blocks, where 'clearly defined accountability mechanisms' is deemed part of the building block on 'planning, monitoring and review'.

Background: multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms

Multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms (MSPs) have the potential to contribute to good governance by allowing for both government leadership and meaningful stakeholder engagement and participation (Stewart & Gray 2006). This can increase effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery, increase governance legitimacy and allow ways to manage conflicting views and interests (Brinkerhoff 2007). More broadly, partnership can be described as a cooperative relationship characterized by a set of values (including trust, transparency, accountability, reciprocity and respect) that evolves through time by mutual learning, voluntary participation and commitment, towards common goals (Schaaf 2015).

In the context of WASH, MSPs exist at both national and global levels, for instance Sanitation and Water for All is a global MSP. However, there is limited research on MSPs relating to WASH and their effectiveness (e.g. Keatman 2012). In comparison, more extensive literature exists relating to MSPs in the broader water sector, such as in integrated water resource management where they have been used to manage competing claims to water and coordination challenges (Warner 2006; Hailu & Tolossa 2020; Sigalla *et al.* 2021). Further research is needed to explore the benefits of MSPs in the delivery of water and sanitation services because they are critical foundations for mutual accountability. Recent research proposed that an effective mutual accountability mechanism should be supported by functioning partnerships (Willets *et al.* 2020). These authors described four main areas of partnership processes as important: (i) Shared vision, purpose, ownership of the partnership; (ii) Transparent, collaborative processes and rules of engagement; (iii) Shared decision-making, action and feedback and (iv) Mutual learning to evolve partnership. They also identified key elements needed to provide the foundation of a partnership, including shared purpose, sufficient partner capability to partner, meaningful multi-stakeholder representation, and effective multi-stakeholder horizontal and vertical relationships in the partnership structure which can provide an equal playing field and bring together a wide range of affected stakeholders, including NGOs, the media, donors, multilateral organizations, private sector and governments.

METHODOLOGY

Case study description

This study was conducted between September and December 2020 by the SWA Research and Learning Constituency partners and collaborators from five member countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru and Somalia. The choice of cases was motivated by geographical diversity and the presence of participating research partners. In addition, only countries that are members of SWA were eligible as cases, where there has been exposure to the SWA MAM. SWA is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that works towards achieving sanitation, hygiene and water for all (SDG 6) through coordinated collaborative action at global, national and sub-national levels. The

SWA MAM allows partners to make commitments and hold each other globally accountable for progress towards the SDG targets, as well as reinforcing country-level multi-stakeholder planning and review processes.

Data collection

Data for this study were collected through a mixed-methods approach using streamlined data collection tools that were implemented by researchers in each case study country who conducted data collection activities. In order to understand WASH mutual accountability processes and the multi-stakeholder partnerships in each of the selected case studies, the first step in data collection involved a document review. Key literature such as policy and planning documents relevant to the WASH sector and publications such as reviews and assessments on progress in WASH were identified and analysed for examples of multi-stakeholder platforms and mutual accountability mechanisms. Next, a stakeholder mapping of the WASH sector was conducted, and this enabled the country teams to identify a diverse range of key stakeholders divided into groups based on SWA constituencies: government, civil society, private sector, research and learning, and external support agencies such as donor organizations. Key stakeholders often included SWA focal points who are country stakeholders that act as SWA representatives. The stakeholder mapping was used for the next steps of data collection to ensure a range of perspectives were collected, with the aim to collect perspective from each constituency group, as well as to cover water, sanitation and hygiene, and differing levels of importance and influence. Next, a streamlined survey and key informant interview guide were developed for use in each case study country, which covered the following topics: multi-stakeholder platforms, accountability mechanism used in the WASH sector, including any mutual accountability mechanism, engagement with SWA, and the SWA MAM in particular and the impact of Covid-19 on existing accountability processes. An online questionnaire was sent to identify key informants in each country case. The online survey was centrally administered and common across all case study countries, ranging from 15 responses in Somalia to a maximum of 25 in Peru (Table 1). The information gathered from the survey served as the basis for the discussion during the key informant interviews. Qualitative data were collected using key informant interviews, where interviewees were selected to represent as many constituencies as possible. Interviews were conducted in person or online with a team of one or two interviewers and were recorded verbatim or recorded using detailed notes taken during the interviews. This information was then thematically analysed according to the main themes in the interview guide by each country team and through discussions with the overall multi-country research team. As part of the research findings validation process, a national workshop was held with key informants and other stakeholders that involved the presentation of initial findings and feedback from participants. The purpose of this workshop was to validate initial findings with participants and to obtain any missing information through a discussion with participants. The results of the study were then summarized by each research team in the form of a country brief and later synthesized into a report for SWA (Butterworth *et al.* 2021).

Table 1 | Summary of data collection activities and participants by case study country

Country	Key informant interviews	Survey respondents	Workshops participants
Bangladesh	10	16	56
Indonesia	7	16	25
Kenya	9	19	6
Peru	7	25	10
Somalia	6	15	9

RESULTS

Existing mutual accountability mechanisms

While there are a range of existing multi-stakeholder platforms in the case study countries that serve to facilitate coordination and communication between WASH stakeholders, they do not currently enable mutual accountability processes. No mutual accountability mechanisms were being employed in the case study countries as we define it in this study, where all actors set targets that other actors hold them accountable for achieving towards a common goal. Instead, mechanisms reported were those traditionally used for vertical accountability, such as

national plans, sector progress or performance reports, committees, and meetings (see [Butterworth *et al.* \(2021\)](#) for more details on these).

The SWA MAM promotes the adoption of joint commitments to which WASH sector actors can hold each other accountable. While all case study countries participated in the SWA MAM, participation is still limited, and commitments have been made unilaterally by a limited group of stakeholders. In the case of Indonesia and Peru, commitments have been made only by governments ([Table 2](#)), while Bangladesh and Somalia have commitments from civil society and external support agencies, respectively, in addition to government. There has been a similar situation in Kenya, although recent efforts by SWA to support MAM commitment setting in Kenya have increased the engagement of different stakeholder groups.

Table 2 | SWA MAM commitments by country in 2020^a

No. of existing commitments in the SWA MAM database	Bangladesh	Indonesia	Kenya	Peru	Somalia
Government	5	3		3	3
Civil Society	5				
Private sector			3		
External support agencies					3
Research and learning					

^aThis analysis was conducted in November 2020, and commitments will continue to be added. For instance, during the course of this study, Kenya was holding consultations to develop government and other stakeholder commitments, so SWA MAM commitments will soon increase.

In Bangladesh, Indonesia and Peru, accountability is seen as mainly an issue involving government as the duty bearer, limiting interest and uptake of mutual accountability mechanisms. For example, in Bangladesh, although CSOs play an important role in development activities, they do not have any legislative or constitutional provision or framework that supports their engagement in development planning and implementation processes with the government. This is seen to limit their power in a mutual accountability context, which means that although there are functioning multi-stakeholder platforms, they struggle to maintain critical government participation that is needed for mutual accountability. In Indonesia, vertical accountability is found within internal government institutions by which ministries/government agencies are required to submit performance reports (*Laporan Kinerja/LAKIP*), which are then made publicly available. The LAKIP reports, however, do not thoroughly discuss sectoral issues. In addition, development partners/donors also publish annual reports which cover their achievement and progress. Although development partners/donors were found to report their progress to government, feedback is not always received. Despite these existing forms of accountability, currently there is no clear mechanism that enables WASH stakeholders to hold each other accountable for their performance (mutual accountability).

The Peru case illustrated that functioning multi-stakeholder platforms are not enough to establish mutual accountability alone. There is an existing multi-stakeholder platform for poverty alleviation, which is a flagship government-led coordination platform, but accountability mechanisms are limited to government policy. Looking towards mutual accountability and the need for a common vision, respondents suggested that the National Sanitation Plan could be the focus of future efforts. Similarly in Indonesia, the Jejaring AMPL is a platform that facilitates coordination for a wide group of WASH stakeholders and is seen as inclusive but does not have mutual accountability mechanisms. However, in Peru, the SWA MAM was seen as a potential means to enable the government to open up accountability processes in the WASH sector to multiple actors.

In Somalia, the situation is characterized by a humanitarian focus due to civil war and an emergency context with limited government resources. Monthly meetings of the humanitarian coordination platform serve to provide a form of vertical accountability between donors and implementers, a ‘soft accountability’ rather than as mutual accountability between all actors including donors, government, civil society and the private sector.

There are potential opportunities to strengthen existing processes to incorporate mutual accountability. For instance, in Bangladesh, there are several national-level accountability mechanisms that allow input on government activities from other actors. For example, the Local Consultative Group (LCG) Water Supply and Sanitation, National Sanitation Taskforce, the National Policy Review Committee and the SDG tracker are forums where the government shares their progress on WASH goals and CSOs get to share their concerns regarding progress.

These offer ways for CSOs to participate in formulating action plans for each target. While these accountability mechanisms are more focused on vertical accountability and government responsibility alone, there is potential to expand on these processes for other partners to also be held accountable on their progress.

Likewise, in Indonesia, the existing WASH multi-stakeholder platforms such as National Pokja AMPL, Jejaring AMPL and SDG forum have the potential to be utilized to facilitate mutual accountability mechanism. National Pokja AMPL, for example, is led by the Bappenas/Ministry of Planning and has been facilitating coordination between government actors in charge of WASH – relevant stakeholders are also invited to their discussion. Jejaring AMPL has a broader membership which is open to, among others, government officials (in their personal capacity), NGOs, research and learning, and aid organizations. Additionally, SDG monitoring platform also emerges as a possible option where SDG targets, including WASH, are being tracked and reviewed.

In Kenya, there has been recent progress that took place after data collection, as a group of stakeholders comprising of government, civil society and the private sector came together in late 2020 to adopt a mutual accountability framework promoted by SWA. Through this framework, the government is expected to lead other stakeholders in making commitments on priority focus areas, while other stakeholders follow suit with their commitments that augment those made by government. Should these stakeholder binding commitments become successful, it presents a promising opportunity for enhancing mutual accountability in the sector.

WASH multi-stakeholder landscapes

As there were no findings on mutual accountability mechanisms, the remainder of the results focus on existing MSPs that could provide a foundation for establishing mutual accountability and their limitations. The findings in five case study countries show that MSPs formed at the national level exist in some form in all cases (Table 3). We defined multi-stakeholder platforms as those comprising more than one SWA ‘constituency,’ i.e., government, civil society, private sector, donors and external support or research and learning. A platform comprised only of civil society organizations such as NGOs was classified as a single stakeholder platform, and relevant examples are shown in Supplementary Material, Table S1. While the MSPs typically serve as communication and coordination platforms for their members, they also have diverse mandates in the WASH sector in their respective countries which includes sharing information and knowledge, influencing sector policy, playing a role in government accountability and transparency, enhancing the participation of various stakeholders, and developing capacity building and partnership. For example, in Indonesia, Jejaring AMPL is a platform that facilitates coordination for a wide group of WASH stakeholders, including governmental actors, development partners and donors, NGOs, private sector, as well as research and learning institutions. Its activities include advocacy, capacity building for its members and related actors, information sharing and partnership development. Key informants described Jejaring AMPL as inclusive and with a partnership spirit. In Peru, the working group on rural water and sanitation, part of the Multi-stakeholder Coordination Platform for Poverty Alleviation, aims to monitor WASH policies and make recommendations to government agencies to strengthen their WASH strategies. In countries with several MSPs, coordination between the different platforms was limited, indicating possible fragmentation between the activities occurring in different MSPs.

In several of the case study countries, active multi-stakeholder platforms and processes were more limited, and other types of single stakeholder platforms were more dominant. In Kenya, while platforms such as the Kenya Water and Sanitation Civil Society Network (KEWASNET) were reported to be active and hold regular meetings and activities, the broad-based multi-stakeholder processes like the Joint Sector Working Group were found to be either ad hoc or dormant. This meant that there were limited active processes coordinated by government actors to improve overall sector coordination with the potential to enable mutual accountability. However, it is important to note that KEWASNET is a strong partnership that could make valuable contributions to a MSP if it was successfully established. In Somalia and Indonesia, the Inter-ministerial WASH Steering Committee and National Pokja AMPL, respectively, focus more on inter-ministerial coordination rather than the involvement of diverse stakeholders. Somalia is emerging from a civil war, which explains the existence of limited MSPs, and instead an emergent inter-ministerial coordination platform and a WASH humanitarian response coordination forum. In the case of Indonesia, National Pokja AMPL receives feedback from relevant stakeholders, but strategic decisions are made by government agencies.

Gaps in multi-stakeholder platforms and processes

In the countries with active multi-stakeholder platforms, these have enabled coordination, development of networks among stakeholders and have influenced policy-making and implementation. For example, in Peru,

Table 3 | Examples of multi-stakeholder platforms in WASH

Country	Platform name	Main function	Composition	Status and regularity	Funding sources
Bangladesh	Local Consultative Group (LCG)	The LCG Forum serves at the national level as technical and policy support group. All government-related partners communicate through LCG. Decisions taken in this forum are then conveyed to the national forum for drinking water supply and sanitation where policy or strategies are based on this.	Is a multi-stakeholder forum for government, NGOs, CSOs, and external support agencies (e.g. ADB, World Bank, JICA, etc.) The Chair of this forum is Local Government Division (LGD) in the ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives and co-chair is UNICEF.	Ad hoc	Unknown
	Citizens Platform for SDGs	The platform provides an opportunity to track the progress of SDG delivery; sensitize policymakers towards challenges in implementation; bring transparency in the implementation process; and facilitate the exchange of information and coordination among all those working on the SDGs in Bangladesh.	Mainly consists of NGOs, CSOs, research organizations and the private sector. The Secretariat of the Platform is hosted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).	Informal and active	Unknown
	Bangladesh Faecal Sludge Management Network	This is a common and collective platform for the sector actors to generate ideas, share views and create and focus more attention on faecal sludge management.	The platform is led by SNV and WaterAid in Bangladesh. This network engages government agencies such as the Department of Engineering, Dept. of Agriculture Extension, Dept. of Fisheries, Sustainable And Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), relevant taskforces, networks and associations including National Sanitation Secretariat, National Forum for Water and Sanitation, Bangladesh Urban Forum (BUF), Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB), etc.	Ad hoc. Has regular conventions at least once a year	Unknown
Indonesia	Jejaring AMPL	A coordination and communication platform consisting of a wide group of WASH stakeholders. Jejaring is an independent organization. Jejaring activities include advocacy, capacity building for the members and relevant actors, as well as partnership development.	Jejaring consists of officials (in a personal capacity), NGOs, international organizations, research and learning organizations and donors. Jejaring is usually chaired by Bappenas officials in their personal capacity. Its steering committee also consists of representatives from relevant agencies in a personal capacity.	Informal. Meets every few months.	Funding from the members

	National Pokja AMPL (Drinking Water and Environmental Health Working Group)	A coordination and communication platform that ensures drinking water and sanitation development – from planning, implementation, monitoring, to the evaluation stage. It also enhances coordination between government actors that are in charge of drinking water and sanitation matters.	National Pokja AMPL officially consists of eight government ministries/institutions, namely Bappenas/Ministry of Planning (coordinator), Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Culture, and Statistics Indonesia. Although the official members consist of ministries/ government agencies (which would define it as a single stakeholder platform), National Pokja AMPL also invites non-government stakeholders as appropriate.	Ad hoc. Used to be frequent, but lately infrequent. Usually hosts meetings based on needs.	State budget
	The Sanitation Partners Group (SPG) focused on urban sanitation	A platform to improve coordination between government and development partners/donors.	Development partners/donors, international organizations, government (Bappenas, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Health). World Bank and UNICEF are among the members.	Status: informal; Regularity: used to be frequent, lately infrequent.	
Kenya	Joint Sector Working Group	Sector coordination	Consists of all key stakeholders in WASH. Was coordinated by an Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC) with several Technical Working Groups.	Dormant (annual review has not happened in 5 years)	NA
	National Steering Committee (NSC) on SDG 6	Coordinates and oversees reporting on SDG 6 progress to UN Water	Convened by the Ministry of Water and Sanitation and is composed of key government ministries, civil society organizations, academia, private sector and development partners.	Ad hoc	Unknown
	Water and Environmental Sanitation Coordination mechanism (WESCOORD)	To achieve a coordinated and integrated approach in the implementation of WASH emergency response in areas that are commonly affected by drought and floods	WESCOORD is chaired by MoWSI and co-chaired by UNICEF. The Ministry of Health also takes on a significant role in WESCOORD, chairing key TWGs in hygiene and sanitation sub-sectors. Membership comprises of WASH humanitarian agencies and national authorities.	Dysfunctional at a national level with ad hoc meetings during disasters. Only active in certain counties.	Unknown
Peru	Rural Water and Sanitation Working Group which is part of the multi-stakeholder	Their main function is to monitor the implementation of national public policies and produce policy	The rural water sanitation group is part of MCLCP, which brings together technical staff from various ministries,	Active with meetings once a month with the possibility of extraordinary sessions	Public financing, but largely dependent on

(Continued.)

Table 3 | Continued

Country	Platform name	Main function	Composition	Status and regularity	Funding sources
	platform for poverty alleviation (MCLCP)	recommendations on water and sanitation issues in rural context.	sub-national governments, civil society, NGOs and others. The MCLCP was created by the Supreme Decree 001-2001-PROMUDEH in 2001. It is currently part of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (MIDIS).	in the case of urgent matters	stakeholders' willingness to engage
Somalia	Somali WASH cluster	A humanitarian platform that coordinates WASH activities	Mainly humanitarian organizations such as UN organizations, NGOs and the private sector, with very few R&L members. Co-chaired by UNICEF and another member organization and includes focal points for 13 regional WASH cluster organizations.	Monthly meetings	Somalia Common Humanitarian Fund

Up to three key MSPs are shown for each case study country. See [Butterworth et al. \(2021\)](#) for more detail on each country MSP landscape.

respondents described that the MCLCP through its Working Group on 'Rural Water and Sanitation' provided recommendations on the provision of drinking water targeting vulnerable population during the Covid-19 pandemic to the Ministry for Housing, Construction and Rural sanitation, and other government institutions. Such recommendations are the result of a series of evaluations and round table sessions between different stakeholders and government authorities. However, there are still gaps in these multi-stakeholder processes that hamper effective collaboration and implementation, and could thus limit opportunities for mutual accountability. One of the major issues is the ad hoc nature of some of the platforms, such as seen in the Bangladesh and Indonesia cases. Indonesia has the National Pokja AMPL, but due to its ad hoc nature it is dependent on the active participation of the members. The same issue is seen with the Local Consultative Group (LCG) of Bangladesh where meetings are irregular and usually held if a certain issue arises. Stakeholders sometimes do not actively participate through articulating their opinions and concerns in the multi-stakeholder process, which hampers constructive planning of policy-making for the sector.

Non-participation of key members is another issue weakening multi-stakeholder processes in some case studies. In Bangladesh, private sector actors have been traditionally less involved in planning and policy-making in multi-stakeholder processes in the WASH sector, so their views are under-represented. In Peru, there is limited integration of community organizations (COs) into existing MSPs as well as all other decision-making processes in the WASH sector. This stems from the fact that COs do not have a clear regulatory framework that ensures their sustainability and legal existence (Ñope Cueva 2019). However, these COs play a crucial role in the administration, operation and maintenance of WASH services in rural areas. According to DATASS (MVCS 2018), there are approximately 25,000 COs that provide sanitation services in rural areas.

In Indonesia, non-governmental actors are not officially members of the National Pokja AMPL. However, it is worth noting that non-governmental actors can be invited to participate in the Pokja's meetings and discussions. In Bangladesh, the results indicated that the sub-sector of hygiene is often left out of planning and policy-making, with the main focus on water and sanitation. This was observed in national platforms such as National forum for drinking water supply and sanitation. The under-representation or the absence of some stakeholders in multi-stakeholder platforms means that some critical issues may not be effectively presented or addressed in the sector planning and policy processes. This is also an issue among single stakeholder platforms, for example in Kenya, the Water Service Providers Association (WASPA) only draws membership from the water and sanitation utilities that are owned by county governments, leaving out other private players that are active in the sector.

A further important gap in many of the cases is lack of financial and human resources and capacity to provide strong government leadership in the promotion and implementation of multi-stakeholder engagement processes. In Peru, budget shortfalls due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a very high level of government turnover in the existing platform made continuity of the work and monitoring of activities almost non-existent. Related to this is a lack of resources and funds to support the functioning of the multi-stakeholder platforms, which was particularly highlighted in the Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia and Peru cases as a limiting factor. This hinders effective engagement and collaboration in the multi-stakeholder processes and gives more power to certain actors funding the activities. In Somalia, the Inter-ministerial WASH Steering Committee is supported by UNICEF with no sustainable government allocated budget, which means that it lacks legitimacy in terms of funding, human resources and enforcement power. In Kenya, a lack of financial resources for a government-led multi-stakeholder platform has resulted in ineffective coordination between the Ministry of Water and Sanitation and the Ministry of Health in their shared mandate to provide leadership and direction in the sector, particularly in the area of sanitation. As a result, in Kenya there was a perceived lack of knowledge and capacity among certain WASH stakeholders to get involved in multi-stakeholder processes.

Finally, in terms of supporting multi-stakeholder processes, a gap identified in the Bangladesh and Peru cases was the limited availability of a standardized and consolidated database for keeping track of progress towards national targets and SDG 6, including WASH services provided by implementers, with open data for all. In the Peru case study, such a system was identified as something that could help with monitoring and coordination of actions between different stakeholders, such as enabling civil society and even the private sector to share their action plans with the government, leading to greater synergy with the National Sanitation Plan. In Bangladesh this type of system was suggested as a way of reducing overlapping of services implemented by agencies.

Finally, in some countries such as Kenya and Peru, the Covid-19 pandemic has provided new opportunities to address these gaps through enhanced sector coordination and greater accountability through the use of electronic platforms and other online resources. In the case of Peru, the use of technologies increased due to the pandemic,

this allowed greater participation of the actors that previously could not attend national meetings or forums because they were usually held in Lima, the capital. Nevertheless, limited access to internet and other communication technologies continues to be a barrier to overcome in several areas of the country.

DISCUSSION

As emphasized in SDG 17, effective partnerships are critical for achieving the SDGs. Promoting collaboration between stakeholders is widely considered to be critical for progress towards both national WASH targets and globally achieving SDG 6. It is important to ensure that multi-stakeholder platforms and partnership processes are as effective as possible to enable this progress. Multi-stakeholder platforms can serve as vehicles to enhance collaboration, innovation, and also have the potential to enable mutual accountability. However, across the cases in this study, we found no specific examples of mutual accountability mechanisms, despite examples of multi-stakeholder platforms and processes. Despite this, countries with effective multi-stakeholder platforms for coordination in the sector have a foundation to build on to establish such processes. As compared with other sectors, the concept of mutual accountability is yet to be widely taken up and the SWA MAM tool is still early in its development and wider application. As the focus in most case study countries was on vertical accountability, such as reviewing commitments set by government, greater awareness and capacity for mutual accountability that involves setting commitments across multiple actors may be needed. Furthermore, a full mutual accountability cycle requires some form of performative review and reaction when commitments are not met (Hepworth *et al.* 2020; Willetts *et al.* 2020).

Although there are few examples of research on MSPs or mutual accountability to draw on in the WASH sector, there are lessons from other sectors that have historically used multi-stakeholder platforms (Warner 2007; Hermans *et al.* 2017; Willetts *et al.* 2020). In watershed management, MSPs have been found to be helpful for communication, coordination, management of competing claims to water, and coalition-building and visioning but require clear goals and results to keep participants interested (Warner 2006; Hailu & Tolossa 2020). Other research on multi-stakeholder platforms has found that they are often characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity, where there are a range of different interests at stake (Kusters *et al.* 2018). This means that participants will often have different views on outcomes, and it is important to outline clear expectations and a common vision when establishing mutual accountability processes.

Active multi-stakeholder platforms were identified in the WASH sector in some of the country cases. In many of these cases, certain actors clearly held an unequal amount of power (e.g. donor or government-driven processes), such as in the case of the government-led MCLCP in Peru. As has been seen in other sectors, it is critical to address power relations among these different actors to ensure mutual interest, engagement and commitments are sustained (Brouwer *et al.* 2013). Establishing effective multi-stakeholder processes in these cases requires specifically reaching out to excluded groups, and establishing new inclusive ways of working where all actors' voices can be heard. This also has benefits as research on MSPs in other sectors has shown that a high level of knowledge exchange is needed to enable innovations, which results from a wide range of participants rather than limited participation of stakeholder groups (Hermans *et al.* 2017). Power analyses and social network analyses offer an opportunity to deepen understanding of many of the linkages and power relations between actors reported in this study (Brouwer *et al.* 2013).

In other cases, a focus on active single stakeholder platforms for external support partners, civil society or private actors contributed to a lack of strong multi-stakeholder engagement, such as in Kenya. This resulted in a fragmented approach to the sector, where certain stakeholder groups are frequently left out, thereby resulting in lack of coherence and also compromising opportunities for mutual accountability. Overall more work is needed to examine the effectiveness and different types of multi-stakeholder platforms for making progress in the sector and towards SDG 6. This includes identifying the most effective mechanisms in order to understand how they can be scaled up to strengthen WASH systems.

Opportunities for improving mutual accountability to strengthen WASH systems

This study shows the lack of use of mutual accountability in the WASH sector in the case study countries to date. Despite these gaps, mutual accountability offers opportunities to strengthen WASH systems and ensure gender and other inequalities are addressed in leaving no one behind (Mannan 2018). There are opportunities to draw on other applications of mutual accountability, and a review by Willetts *et al.* (2020) of four partnerships and one global accountability mechanism outside the WASH sector found five key elements in an effective

cycle of mutual accountability: stakeholder responsibilities, obligations or commitments are clarified and communicated; stakeholders share information with one another on their performance; performance by each stakeholder is explained, discussed and evaluated; a reputational or relational consequence (of performance or non-performance); and corrective action is undertaken by stakeholders to better achieve partnership goals. Consequences are an important part of mutual accountability that differentiate it from partnerships alone. In the case of the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council, this works on the basis of learning rather than on actual naming and shaming. This review also found that in some cases, there were examples of partial cycles, where regular meetings and reports on progress contributed to performance review, but were missing next steps of behaviour change if commitments were not met.

Since this study data were collected, Kenya has taken steps to apply the SWA MAM tool more widely, so this is a promising case to observe going forward. To better enable mutual accountability, it is important to focus on strengthening foundational elements of multi-stakeholder platforms and processes in the WASH sector as a first step. The findings indicate the importance of establishing strong multi-stakeholder processes and platforms that are cross-sectoral and bring together government, external support organizations, civil society (including larger organizations as well as small community-based organizations), the private sector and research actors on the same level. Global-level processes such as the SWA partnership and the MAM can play a key role in adding legitimacy and collective scrutiny to track performance against commitments.

A challenge to consider may be the resource intensive structures required to ensure equitable, effective and sustainable collaboration between actors (MacDonald *et al.* 2018). For instance, MSPs require certain actors to coordinate and drive the process forward on a regular basis with dedicated resources, rather than on an ad hoc basis. Donor-driven multi-sectoral platforms may not be sustainable in the long run to enable mutual accountability. In the WASH sector, this role would ideally be taken up by government actors, which is in line with what Sanitation and Water for All terms 'Collaborative Behaviours' for the sector, which includes 'Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes'.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined multi-stakeholder platforms and mutual accountability in the WASH sector across a series of cases in Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia, Peru and Somalia. While many of the case study countries have existing multi-stakeholder platforms in the WASH sector, these typically function as coordination and communication platforms rather than as platforms for mutual accountability. There were no mutual accountability mechanisms being widely used in the WASH sector that involve a full accountability cycle, and this is an emerging area for further research and policy engagement.

Improving multi-stakeholder platforms and processes is a clear next step to lay the foundations for mutual accountability. A national-level focus is needed to integrate context-specific mutual accountability mechanisms into existing or strengthened multi-stakeholder platforms. This includes ensuring a wide range of stakeholders are represented, recognizing and addressing power imbalances where possible and putting in place well-resourced government coordinated processes. Ensuring more actors have an equitable seat at the table can contribute to the good governance needed to strengthen WASH systems and achieve SDG 6 targets for water and sanitation. To support this, further research to examine causal pathways and connections between effective multi-stakeholder platforms and improved service delivery is needed to operationalize mutual accountability more widely.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data cannot be made publicly available; readers should contact the corresponding author for details.

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First received 30 January 2021; accepted in revised form 23 March 2022. Available online 5 April 2022