SWAPs in motion

Sector wide approaches: From an aid delivery to a sector development perspective

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Preface

This paper has been developed as a contribution to the Joint Learning Programme on Sector Wide Approaches. The JLP offers sector-specific in-country learning events for development agency partners and domestic stakeholders and is financed by Denmark, EU, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. The paper is a critical stocktaking based on 12 JLP events (see annex 1), with the intention of contribution to the general debate about programme based approached and aid delivery methods. It has been written by Nils Boesen and Desiree Dietvorst, from the consultant team contracted to facilitate the JLP events.

A draft version was presented and discussed in a workshop hosted by Europe Aid in Brussels on May 14-15th, 2007 with 35 participants from 12 development agencies. This final version has benefited from these discussions, and particularly from the summary and reflections provided by Stephen Lister from Mokoro Ltd. However, the authors assume full responsibility and stress that the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions of donors funding and managing the JLP events.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations

JLP	Joint Learning Programme
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MTEF	Medium term expenditure framework
PAF	Performance Assessment Framework
PBA	Programme based approach
PFM	Public financial management
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategies
SWAp	Sector wide approach
TA	Technical Assistance

Executive Summary

The Paris Agenda has strengthened the interest in Sector Wide Approaches (SWAps). Reflecting this interest, the Joint Learning Programme on SWAps (JLP), a multi-donor initiative, has since 2006 received requests for events from more than 25 countries, and has so far held 14 events. This paper collects the experience gathered during these events.

The Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), as well as the wider concept of Programme Based Approaches (PBA), was born out of a concern about aid effectiveness. However, this is not the ultimate objective, of course: The ultimate objective should be not so much effective *aid*, but effective *development*.

This paper argues that maintaining a narrower focus on aid with SWAps (and PBAs) viewed as aid delivery mechanisms risks confusing the means with the ends. Such a vision risks the pursuit of processes (like alignment), instruments (like Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks) and support modalities (like budget support) as if these are ends in themselves.

In the programme approach donors support country programmes and work to strengthen country systems. This takes development efforts out of the relatively safe environments that projects offered, and brings all the messy conditions of the real world to the table. Yet, the JLP events show that SWAps still tend to follow a technocratic approach assuming that comprehensive policies developed by executive agencies – often with donor assistance - can be translated into budget allocations and public sector driven implementation. Making this supply-driven approach work assumes a benevolent government driven by apolitical anti-poverty goals. Most SWAps struggle to factor in the political dimension and the drivers for and against change in the sector, and only scant attention is given to creating an environment that allows the domestic demand for development and change to grow.

From an aid delivery to a sector development perspective

This said, SWAps and PBAs continue to be relevant approaches to development assistance, fundamentally because they are relevant approaches to development itself. The central argument of this paper is that there is need to move beyond the aid delivery focus and embrace the SWAp as an approach to effective sector development.

Taking a sector wide perspective makes common sense from a planning and development point of view; many constraints are inter-related and only a look at the bigger picture can address some of the 'blockages' or 'leakages' in the system as a whole. Governments can adopt this sector wide perspective as a sensible approach to development, and they can do so without the support of any donor at all.

This broadens the agenda: it is no longer 'just' about how aid can best be delivered in a sector; but rather about how the sector can best develop, and if and how donors can support this. Seen from this angle, aid becomes one (potential) means towards the objective (or end) that is development. In the JLP events, this distinction between 'means' and 'ends' brings a lot of clarity to the table: It is no longer about: How good must our policy, or public financial management (PFM), be for donors to buy into it? But instead about: How good should our policy and public financial management be to effectively address sector constraints?

Sector diagnosis: time for a review of assessment areas?

Underpinning the sector wide approach is a sector diagnosis. The model used in the JLP divides the sector into five assessments areas namely (i) sector policies in a macro-context; (ii) public financial management; (iii) institutions and capacities; (iv) accountability and monitoring; and (v) harmonisation and alignment. Though useful because of its simplicity, this ‘five-way cut’ may risk overlooking important factors, and we propose:

- To add four areas of assessment: (i) actual sector performance; (ii) the wider political economy; (iii) governance and accountability at sector level and (iv) decentralisation;
- To adopt an ‘actor-perspective’ as a second point of entry into the sector diagnosis in addition to the current functional/technical perspective. This would ensure a systematic consideration of the role of different domestic actors (political system, the executive, the private sector, civil society etc.) in each assessment area.

We realise that to look beyond the ‘technical comfort zone’ and take account of the political realm as part of a more holistic and systemic view of the sector is challenging; yet the JLP events have moved in this ‘direction of complexity’ almost naturally by picking up on the challenges presented in each of the five current assessment areas. Key findings for each of these areas include the following:

Sector Policy

The notion of ‘a policy’ in the SWAp seems to be based on a notion of development *planning* through the application of rational methods to problem solving which largely ‘plan away’ major conflicts, special interest and power issues. The widespread perception that a policy is a document, and a ‘new policy’ is thus a ‘new document’ sustains this observation.

Although there are exceptions, sector policies tend to be too ambitious compared to past sector performance, available capacity and available resources. Governments are reluctant to make hard choices and this appears to be accepted by donors. Whereas much effort goes into developing new policies, not enough is done to understand why past policies failed.

SWAps run the risk of overestimating the capacity of development states to convert policies into practice. That is, the capacity may be sufficient for some basic policies (*eg* stable, low inflation and a sound fiscal balance), but providing quality education to poor girls in remote areas may simply be beyond short term reach. Too narrow a focus on policy content in SWAPs may risk overextending the state, based on unrealistic ambitions and assumptions about policy effectiveness.

Public Finance Management

The budget and how it is converted into spending is a cornerstone of SWAps: Sector policy and the associated sector budget are seen as two wheels, with public finance management as the axis in between. In this paper, we do not question the basics of this philosophy, but make some qualifications with respect to the centrality of the budget and PFM issues.

First, the formal public budget is often *de facto* not very important. If the biggest slice of the budget is tied to salaries, while investment and operational costs come either through donors or through lobbying for cash during the budget year, then the idea of the centrality of the budget is far removed from actual practice. Second, the public budget may be key in high public investment sectors like health and education, but in sectors where the quality of the regulatory framework is more the issue (*eg* productive sectors, environment and trade) the budget is much less the vehicle for translating policies into practice. And finally, channelling donor funds through the national budget does not automatically strengthen the budget process: If government-donor funding negotiations take place at sector level and without involvement of the Ministry of Finance, then the subsequent inclusion of donor funds in the budget is more window-dressing than part of the actual budget process.

Despite these qualifications, PFM issues continue to be of crucial importance in the SWAp. But it is time to adopt a realist approach less driven by idealistic models of budget-policy links and advanced budget techniques, and more based on dialogue and initiatives for reform that are tailored to country conditions as well as the capacity and willingness to change.

Institutions, Capacity and Decentralisation

Capacity development is strongly on the agenda in SWAps. All agree that it is crucially important; the whole idea of the move from projects to programmatic aid is to strengthen national systems and capacities. From this positive starting point the challenges in the sector programmes are building up, and we often find that capacity development is treated like an after-thought to policy making, even to programme design: At times it appears as if both government and donors feel that as long as the capacity-gap is identified, it can be filled.

In addition, if the SWAp is about the strengthening of national systems and local actors, then this implies adopting a long-term horizon for steady, but possibly slow processes in which systems grow stronger both through internal effort as well as external pressure. It also means looking beyond the familiar capacity development initiatives of training and Technical Assistance and lowering programme expectations to a realistic stage.

The SWAp has often been accused of being a centralising approach with its focus on government and the national level. Indeed, also during the JLP events it becomes evident that SWAps risk anchoring key actors (from government and development partners) solidly in offices, meetings and conference rooms in the capitals thereby losing touch with the realities on the ground. In addition, too great a focus on the vertical sector approach may come at the cost of territorial approaches that emphasise local autonomy and local government mandates. Decentralisation has been discussed in the JLP in terms of the balance between local autonomy and central steering, rather than the narrower harmonising between donor support to the sector and donor support to decentralisation.

Accountability and Monitoring

SWAps tend to promote a rather supply-driven notion of how to strengthen accountability: Pro-poor policies are funded; money is pumped through the system by strengthening the PFM-engine; and monitoring ensures that the plan is constantly improved. But whether domestic accountability has been improved should be questioned.

In practice, SWAps have focused strongly on fiscal accountability (PFM systems) and on the verification of pro-poor sector outcomes, but neither the focus on PFM or on MDG indicators strengthens downward, domestic accountability structures: Elections are won on progress as perceived by citizens, not on progress as documented by indicators. There is a growing recognition, also in the JLP events, that aid itself can undermine domestic accountability. Where government salaries and services are paid by aid rather than by tax-payers and service users, the aid provided risks removing government away from the people it is meant to serve.

For the SWAp to become an effective vehicle for sector development, it has to create more room for service users to hold service providers to account. Demand driven domestic accountability has to be mainstreamed in SWAps. Donors, on their part, need to take account of their impact on domestic accountability. Where donor staff is pushed more by their head-offices than they are pulled by the partner institutions they support, then accountability lines upwards will dominate those downward and much scope for mutual accountability is lost.

Harmonisation, Alignment and Support Modalities

The Paris Agenda visibly matters; it has provided an unprecedented push for harmonisation and alignment (H&A). The JLP events often become a platform for creating additional awareness and for building up momentum towards commitments to align behind a single national strategy, make joint appraisal and monitoring missions and buy into common performance assessment frameworks.

But the strides forward also harbour a particular risk especially in aid dependent countries, which is that the efforts to coordinate donors may crowd out the efforts to coordinate the domestic sector players. In the narrow aid effectiveness perspective, the focus on donor coordination is logical. In the broader sector development perspective domestic sector coordination comes first, and donor coordination is a sub-set of this wider issue.

Sector and donor coordination is time-consuming. Contrary to SWAp expectations, the transaction costs do not decrease in the short run. But should they? If coordination results in improved sector performance, then the effort may be worth the cost. This said there seems to be considerable scope for making coordination more efficient and result oriented.

In the JLP, we stress that the SWAp is not about disbursement modalities, but an inclusive approach that all can follow. Where donors have expressed an interest in supporting the sector, the SWAp offers the government a tool to coordinate such support in whatever modality it is provided (budget support, pooled funding or following single-donor procedures). Which modality to use is a decision that needs to be made on the basis of a 'best-fit assessment' made jointly between donors and government. Some modalities are eventually more aligned than others, but we stress that much can be done with respect to harmonisation and alignment quite apart from funding modalities.

Sectors where the state is primarily a regulator

SWAps have worked best in sectors with high public investment and where government is the main service provider. Early programmes in agriculture bogged down in disagreements over the role of the state or because of the sheer unmanageability of maintaining consensus and coordinating actions involving multiple ministries. Thus, the reputation of agriculture and related sectors became such that popular wisdom declared them as less-SWAp-able.

Delineation of the sector is the first stumbling block in a 'sector' like agriculture or rural development. Delineation of the budget and associated SWAp building blocks like MTEFs are subsequent problems. The idea of a single budget framework or a single sector MTEF as the basis for a sector wide programme in agriculture or in rural development carries a danger of setting up artificial structures and systems that go against (and may even undermine) the fundamental administrative and budget frameworks in the country. Attempts to translate a rural development or even an agriculture sector policy into a single programme will likely lead to institutional logjam. A more practical way forward may be a set of complementary (sub) programmes whereby each is coherent enough to generate momentum but sufficiently autonomous to be implemented independently.

Whether the unruly sectors are truly unruly, or whether the classical SWAp sectors of education and health will ultimately turn out to be the odd ones out remains to be seen. Experiences accumulate that government is only one player, even in high public investment sectors; that no sector is a closed entity and that much of what constitutes sector development will always be outside the mandate of a single lead ministry. The near exclusive focus on government and the public budget, the lack of a political economy and an actor perspective, may be SWAP shortcomings that development partners have been getting away with in the education and health sectors. But even there, the lessons from unruly sectors are applicable and what we are looking at is more a difference of degree, rather than of kind.

Some conclusions

SWAps and PBAs offer an opportunity to deal with the messy, conflict-ridden, multi-actor and multi-incentive realities of sectors in developing countries and of donors from developed countries. But the conceptual approach has two risks as well as a promising middle ground.

The first risk is that SWAps become another Planner's Dream, marked by a quest for coherent and consulted policies, actionable plans, robust and reliable PFM systems, evidence streaming out of smart monitoring systems, and donors aligning happily behind the wagon. This scenario is setting the signpost so far as to never reach actual implementation.

The second risk is the opposite of the first: Taking an approach that assumes that chaos is all-pervasive and continuous and that all that can be done is keeping it basic and simple by way of an unprincipled, unguided 'muddling through'. Between these two extremes is the promising middle ground for SWAps, which recognizes the complexity and accepts the mess. This is by far the most demanding and difficult option, but also the one that shows most potential. We have argued that it would entail:

- moving beyond the aid effectiveness agenda in SWAps and adopt a sector development perspective as the basic point of departure
- recognising the fundamental political nature of sector development processes and understanding drivers and constraints to change;

- adding a consistent actor/stakeholder perspective on SWAps and sector programmes, asking not only what is in it, but also who are in it and who does what;
- strengthening managerial inputs in the process – stronger "management from the top" from domestic authorities, better "management from below" from donors.
- focusing on results in a basic, common sense, practical way in all processes and encounters related to SWAps and sector development.

Such a 'strategic incrementalism' is a tall order. We notice that when we succeed, in the JLP events, to make participants see this picture of the way forward for the SWAp in a sector, then communication eases, and things that were difficult to discuss become much clearer.

This way of seeing the approach is based on, but also contributes to trust, which is a basic ingredient in making any complex mix of interdependent actors work fruitfully together. Trust in SWAps is built slowly by many factors, and can be destroyed rapidly by as many: It is our belief that a rather modest, realistic and patient approach to SWAps will add to the trust that eventually will lead to reasonable results.

1. Introduction

'The more you hear about programme-based approaches, the more confused you become' is an oft heard comment at the start of a joint learning event on Sector Wide Approaches. Fortunately, experience shows that the initial confusion is eventually cleared up in the course of the discussions, but yet, it has to be admitted and accepted that a certain amount of confusion will continue to be part of 'this new way of doing business'. The stepping stones of the project-era, such as log-frames and project-cycles, managed to create a sense of security based on instruments and tools that, when applied correctly and conscientiously, would lead to relatively predictable models of project design.

Much as the lack of sustainability of such 'project-cocoons' is now recognised, it may appear that, while we are struggling to leave behind narrow project-thinking, we have only gone part of the way with sector-wide approaches as we have yet to draw the full implications of this approach. The programme-based approach (PBA) implies that step-by-step recipe books are likely to be a thing of the past, while dealing with complexity and uncertainty is becoming the name of the game. Nevertheless, as implementation experience accumulates, common principles and lessons do emerge and these can serve as a guide to do things better.

The Joint Learning Programme (JLP) on Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp) aims to provide access to these emerging principles and lessons. It was set up by a group of donors[1] under the auspices of Train4Dev, a broader donor network promoting joint training for own and partner government staff. The learning events are country and sector tailored, and rely on participant inputs as well as local presentations. As such they prove to be useful platforms of learning and exchange, not only between the actors in the sectors, but also between the theory and the practice more generally.

After a trial run of three events in 2005, the JLP started formally in January 2006. Since then, 12 events were carried out and a further seven are planned. By early 2008, country-wise the events will have taken place in nine African, five Asian, three Latin American, and one Middle Eastern country. Sector-wise, Education will have been covered in eight events, Water in six, Health in four and Agriculture/Forestry also in four. In addition, we will have had two multi-sector events; and one each in the sectors of Roads, Environment and Decentralisation. Six events covered more than one sector. Annex 1 presents an overview of JLP events to date[2].

This paper takes a closer look at the SWAp experiences as discussed in the JLP and highlights some critical issues to stimulate the thinking and discussion on programme-based approaches. We draw primarily on experience gathered during JLP events, but resource documents were used wherever relevant. It should be noted though, that the paper does not pretend to be a 'State of the Art' analysis nor an exhaustive review of experiences.

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[1] The Joint Learning Events on SWAps are presently funded by Denmark, EU, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K.

[2] Lessons on the JLP design and process are captured in *Joint Learning Programme on Sector Programmes: Report on Events 2006 – April 2007* by Nils Boesen, May 2007

2. Emerging lessons

We think it is a good idea to have a SWAp for our sector. But what is the idea exactly?

Participant from Nicaragua

The Paris Agenda has strengthened the interest in programme-based approaches and SWAps. Since its inception, the JLP has received requests for more than 40 events from more than 25 countries, which in itself is an indicator that any attempts to declare SWAps for dead are highly premature. This said, both the requests for JLP events and, more importantly, the urge to move towards SWAps are more driven by donors than by governments. It is not unusual to find participants say at the start of the event that "the donors want to give us a SWAp and so we are here to learn what it is that we need to do to get one". We have seen notable exceptions, but also situations where there was only weak government commitment and only limited joint dialogue and shared understanding of the concept, the content and the processes of the SWAp. In these cases, the JLP event becomes a virtual starting point for embarking on a more structured process towards adopting a SWAp or PBA. In such countries or sectors there is little 'formal' SWAp progress to report, but even then, experiences can be shared about components or building blocks of possible future sector programmes.

Capacity to SWAp: Incentives to SWAp

Quite often, the technical and political analysis shared by development, government and non-state partners about the issues, drivers and constraints in the sector is quite limited. Fortunately, we have seen promising departures from this picture, but challenges remain: The typical civil servants in the JLP events (whether from government or aid agencies) are operators rather than development or reform specialists, and they find it difficult to deal with wider strategic issues across vertical and horizontal organisational boundaries and addressing a complex myriad of technical, institutional and political issues.

Coming to practical ('actionable') terms with the real complexity of a sector is thus a key challenge in the SWAp. First, the concepts, structures and processes for doing so are not ready-made. Second, the challenge is not only about what domestic actors should do, but also about what donors should do to move beyond the limitations of 'their' projects or interests to become helpful (rather than harmful) to the sector as a whole. This said there are positive signs that government and development partners embrace more complex approaches: There is a growing recognition of the importance of involving non-state actors in the SWAp, no matter which sector. And there is wide acknowledgement that non-state actor participation should be considered in all areas; in policy formulation, in implementation, in monitoring and in the accountability set-up. There is also recognition of the importance of involving the political level (parliament, parties), but we are still waiting for the first JLP event with participation of parliamentarians or party representatives.

The importance of addressing the link to decentralisation processes, and to other cross-cutting programme approaches like HIV/Aids initiatives, is also broadly acknowledged, adding another element of complexity to the equation. We will return to these themes in due course.

SWAp processes

We meet good examples of organisation and collaboration processes between government and development partners, but also cases of surprisingly ineffective set-ups with formal meetings with little real dialogue, with loose and haphazard agendas, poorly prepared meetings and opaque joint decision making processes. Working in a business-like manner in multiple extended networks is clearly not yet a core capacity of many actors in the SWAp processes.

The often very incipient stage of the SWAp processes which we meet may indicate that, for all parties concerned, the incentives to pursue programme approaches are still rather weak: The SWAp does not reduce transaction costs; on the contrary, these costs increase initially, and though the kind of costs may change, they are likely to continue to be perceived as high. The SWAp does not speed up disbursement rates either, unless budget support is applied nearly as a matter of principle rather than as a result of careful analysis. And the SWAp does not empower the sector ministry vis-à-vis other agencies (or donors); on the contrary, it may strengthen Ministries of Finance, and it may imply getting the donors too close for comfort; especially when these have a poor understanding of the political economy of the sector; have unrealistic expectations; or are not dealing wisely with the intricacies of ownership.

These general lessons raise important questions about the concept of SWAps and PBAs, about whether there is capacity (leadership, skills, incentives etc.) on the government, civil society and donor side to pursue the noble theory and convert it into pro-poor results on the ground. We can not provide answers to this, but we hope to highlight some tensions and dilemmas between what seems to be a sensible approach in theory – and the practice of making it work.

3 The conceptual framework: New directions?

The Sector-Wide Approach was first described more systematically in the mid 90s (Harrold et al, 1995). It was seen as a means to mitigate the weaknesses of traditional projects. Sector Investment Programmes were proposed as an alternative to projects and included (despite their name) support to both recurrent and investment costs; thus representing a radical departure from the tradition of donors to perceive development financing as limited to (their) investment funding.

The term Programme-Based Approach was coined in 2001, in response to the first wave of Poverty Reduction Strategies[3]. The introduction of Poverty Reduction Strategies changed the mode of support at the macro-level by offering a country owned programme as a framework for sector support. To capture the principles of this new kind of aid both at the macro as well as the sector level, the term PBA was introduced as a generic or collective term used for 'SWAp and SWAp-like' interventions, at the sector, the macro, the sub-sector or the cross-sector or thematic level. Thus, the PBA concept, like that of the SWAp, essentially emerged from a preoccupation with aid effectiveness.

Both PBA and SWAp denote an approach, a way of working. Though often referred to, 'a PBA' or 'a SWAp' is not a thing, or a document, or an aid modality: The approach or way of working leads to a 'programme'; either a sector programme in the case of SWAp; or a thematic, sub-sector or cross-sector wide programme under the PBA. Crucially, this programme is a national programme, not a donor programme. Donors can support this national programme, and they apply different terms for this (Sector Programme Support, or Sector Policy Support Programme[4]) as the operational outcome of the SWAp; or policy-based or programmatic support to other PBAs, including support to Poverty Reduction Strategies.

From an aid delivery to a sector development perspective

This conceptual origin is not as trivial as it may seem: Unfolding its implications means trouble for both the genesis (dissatisfaction with aid effectiveness) and the objectives (the wish to strengthen it) of SWAp and PBA as is argued below:

In essence a sector-wide perspective is simply a common sense planning tool that can help politicians and planners to better divide (public) resources over priorities. Whether these resources are from domestic or foreign sources is important, but not the key point. A sector wide approach to development allows for a more inclusive participation of stakeholders and a more effective addressing of inter-related constraints. Donors may support such an approach, but donors themselves do not 'do SWAps' and do not 'have Sector Programmes'. In fact, a country can have a sector-wide approach to development and one or more sector programmes

[3] See Lavergne and Alba, 2001
[4] This term somewhat confusingly denotes the donor support as a 'support programme'; e.g. a donor support programme supporting the national programme.

without any support of donors at all. The statement "you don't need donors to SWAp" is often met with open-mouth astonishment in the JLP.

Where donors have expressed an interest in supporting the sector, the sector wide approach offers governments a tool to coordinate such support, in whatever modality it is provided. Whether donor money is mixed with that of government (budget support), pooled with that of other donors (common fund or basket) or kept separately is a decision that needs to be made on the basis of a 'best-fit assessment' made jointly between donors and government.

In summary, born out of a concern of aid effectiveness, the aim of the introduction of SWAps and PBAs was to make aid more effective. This is also the ambition of the Paris Agenda[5]. But this is, of course, not the ultimate aim: The ultimate aim is to make country or sector development processes effective for poverty reduction. In this wider perspective, the SWAp becomes a *domestically owned and driven approach for effective sector development management*. This broadens the agenda: it is no longer 'just' about how aid can best be delivered in a sector; but rather about how the sector can best develop, and if and how donors can support this.

Distinguishing between 'means' and 'ends'

The JLP events have, without necessary being aware of it, moved strongly in this 'systemic' direction. We deliver a discourse and a conceptual framework for assessing the key 'components' of a sector, and for the strengthening of a country-owned and -managed sector development process. The role of donors in this perspective is to support and encourage the sector development process, thereby also achieving the 'objective of a lesser order', i.e. aid effectiveness. As put by a donor participant in Rwanda: "I didn't know that this would be a whole event on public administration". But in essence, a SWAp becomes, in this perspective, predominantly about effective public administration and management in a sector.

Thus, the JLP focus is strongly on the ultimate objective that is effective sector development: Processes (*eg* harmonisation), instruments (*eg* performance assessment frameworks) and even financing modalities (*eg* budget and basket support) are all discussed as virtuous or less virtuous 'means' towards that end. This distinction between 'means' and 'ends' brings a lot of clarity to the table: It is no longer about: How good must our policy be for donors to buy into it? but instead about: How good should our policy be to effectively address sector constraints? The question is not: How strong do our financial management systems need to be for donors to trust us with budget support? But the question is: How strong do our financial management systems need to be such that we can channel resources to sector priorities?

In this paper, we argue that the SWAp/PBA concept should move beyond the aid effectiveness agenda and beyond the limitations of an aid delivery instrument. However, in reality, donors and governments are still often going the opposite way by reducing the SWAp or PBAs to an

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[5] It should be noted that the Paris Declaration is about effective aid; and not about budget support or indeed about any other financial modality in particular.

aid delivery mechanism or modality (typically budget support). This approach risks that technical means and modalities are pursued as if these are ends in themselves!

Table 1 summarises the wider 'means-and-ends-hierarchy' that we refer to in the JLP and in this paper.

	Development partner means-ends logic		
	Sector development effectiveness objectives	Aid effectiveness objectives	Means (modalities, instruments)
Government means-ends logic	Pro-poor sector development that is sustainable	Increased recipient ownership	Country owned policy and programmes; use of local systems and procedures; budget support
	Responsiveness to citizens' demand, curb on power abuses and rent seeking	Strengthening domestic accountability and monitoring	Working within local systems and procedures, through local actors; reduce parallel implementation and accountability structures
		Strengthening mutual accountability	Aid that is on-budget and aligned to domestic budget cycles;
	Comprehensive, sustainable policy-based sector service delivery and regulation	Increased coherence of domestic and external efforts	Sector wide policy, sector wide programme & budget; donor coordination
		Capacity building of local actors & organisations	Focus on local actors, systems and procedures; no parallel implementation structures
	Efficient use of all available resources	Improved distribution of (public) resources over policy priorities	Sector wide policy, sector wide programme & budget; MTEFs; donor coordination
		Improved predictability and reliability of aid	Aid that is 'on budget' and aligned to domestic budget cycles; budget support
		Reduced transaction costs of aid	Donor coordination; use of local systems and procedures

Table 1: Means and ends in sector development

Sector diagnosis or: How to cut the cake?

In the JLP events we have generally not found a lot of solid sector analysis on which sector programmes and sector programme support is built. More often than not, policies are poorly developed wish lists, weakly linked to fragile budget processes, whilst the understanding of the sector dynamics and political economy is informal and limited. This weak analysis underpinning the design of sector programmes has been noted more widely[6]. Thus, it seems to make sense to look at the sector in all its complexity, to understand the drivers and constraints to change, the actors, their interests, the effect that policies can have, the limits to capacity, the effects of monitoring and the requirements for strengthening accountability and governance at sector level. Adapting such a holistic approach is intellectually appealing, but such a systemic view on the SWAp also increases the challenges for all involved: Given the current incentives and disincentives in donor and partner organisations, and given the analytical and organizational capacities of donors and partners, can such complexity be handled and converted into implementation? Or are we moving the signpost further beyond reach and turning the SWAp into an eternal academic study that never gets into action? With, in the meantime, donors and partners acting per instinct, per tradition or because there was, at the end of the day, simply money waiting to be spent?

Despite these challenges, the JLP events have been moving in this “direction of complexity” and we are increasingly trying to foster a dialogue around these wider questions about sector performance. We are challenging the participants to apply a “helicopter view” on their sector and offer them a framework to make that operational.

As a basis for diagnosis, we divide the sector into five areas of assessment: (i) sector policies in a macro-context; (ii) public financial management; (iii) institutions and capacities; (iv) accountability and monitoring; and (v) harmonisation and alignment. Although this ‘cut’ seems to have grown out of happenstance rather than out of an underlying model, it has worked reasonably well as a balance between too gross simplifications and too nuanced complexity. We twist a few arms here and there to fit everything in, such as the crucial political economy perspective (without which SWAps are reduced to technocratic pastimes).

In this paper, we follow these five areas as mentioned above, however, we do note that this ‘five-piece cut’ does approach the sector assessment from a mostly technocratic and strongly aid oriented perspective. Following our argument of taking the SWAp to the ‘higher’ level of being a sector development approach, we advocate a re-think of this ‘cutting of the sector cake’. Based on experiences in the JLP, we propose to add at least four elements of diagnosis to this model: (i) actual sector performance; (ii) the wider political economy; (iii) governance and accountability at sector level and (iv) decentralisation and deconcentration. Furthermore, we propose as a second entry-point to sector diagnosis the adoption of an ‘actor-perspective’, in addition to the current functional/technical perspective. Annex 2 attempts to elaborate these emerging ideas a bit further, but it should be noted that these are offered as potential alternatives and food for thought, rather than matured proposals.

[6] See also: Van Reesch, 2007

4. Sector Policies

The donors have put me in the driver's seat: As their chauffeur!

PS Education, Zambia

Full country ownership – however we define it - is difficult to achieve and often compromised. Donors continue to push and in various cases dominate the policy process. They do that because they are under time and disbursement pressure; or because they want to ensure that the process is participatory (as donors understand that concept). They may also do so because they want the policy content to reflect current (international development agenda) concerns. At the same time, neither donors nor government partners have in general very clear ideas about what a "good enough policy" and a "good enough policy process" is.

Nevertheless, we have seen promising policy processes setting realistic and achievable goals, backed by strong country ownership, resources and pushed by an energetic drive for implementation. Access to primary education in Uganda is maybe the best known example. There are other cases where careful attention to policy processes has been useful: In Uganda, the Private Sector Foundation was offered a big say in the policy formulation of the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture, which is one reason why the Plan is more explicit about the conditions that private investors and entrepreneurs need. Widespread ownership is especially important where the policy concerns politically volatile issues such as land reform; user fees; the privatisation of parastatals; the retrenchment of staff; or the relocation of people. However, such truly owned policy processes take long and the question is whether donors have the time and the patience to support them (box 1).

Box1: Land Reform in Namibia

For the preparation of the Land Reform Policy an all Namibian advisory board was established in 2003 initiated by the Minister of Lands (now President) and supported by development partners. Members of this board included central and sector ministry representatives, academia as well as representatives from the (largely white) commercial farmers' union and from the (largely black) communal farmers union. Over a period of three years, the board carried out widespread stakeholder consultations and country-wide in-depth studies on land quality, usage and distribution patterns. From the start, the process was linked to a Cabinet Committee. By 2006 a policy proposal was put forward to Cabinet, which was endorsed by Parliament in 2007. The policy has now been translated into a 3 year strategic rolling plan, from which are derived the work-programme of the Ministry of Lands and components in work-programmes of other ministries contributing to the implementation. The policy is not only widely known but also owned by the stakeholders concerned. Both commercial and communal farmer unions refer to the policy as a useful guide towards land reform. Donors too now agree that the outcome has been successful given the potential political hazards; however, according to the Director of Planning of the Ministry of Lands, this four-year long process has had to withstand continuous pressure from donors waiting to disburse.

We think it is important to recognise that the notion of 'a policy' in the SWAp has developed from a notion of development *planning* by techno- and bureaucrats who tend to apply formally rational methods to problem solving and action planning, and largely 'plan away' major conflicts, special interests and power issues. The still quite widespread perception that a policy is a document, and a 'new policy' is thus a 'new document' sustains this perception. This rather reductionist notion of policies might make sense in sectors starting from scratch. A first sensible step might then be to discuss the broad directions for the sector development process, and put that down on paper. But even in such rare circumstances it would be required to ask first, which policy *processes* would get actors on board so that policies are backed by sufficient power; and second, which capacity is needed in the "downstream" system to transform the policy into results.

Sector policies are still often treated as an exclusive affair of the executive, but it is encouraging to observe an increasing awareness of the important role of parliaments, even in presidential systems. In Nicaragua, a new tax code was informally discussed with opposition parties and key private sector stakeholders before being presented to and approved by the national assembly which at that point in time otherwise routinely rejected government proposals as part of the general power struggle.

In the JLPs we discuss the effectiveness of previous and present policy or strategy documents. It is common that participants recognize that previous policies have not been very successful, but it is rare that we get good answers as to why the current policy should be any different.

The sector in the macro context

We observe a growing awareness that sector policies must reflect and be consistent with overarching policy frameworks, notably with Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) where these exist. This does not mean that sector policies are always fully consistent with a PRS or with a national development policy: a PRS may have been defined some years ago, and a recent sector policy may modify the earlier position. A new government taking over may also want to change sector policies before the macro framework is changed – or vice-versa. In Guatemala, the JLP for education took place three months before elections. The event kicked-off an intensive debated how the SWAp could and should be "carried over" from the outgoing to the incoming administration. Rather than "ensuring continuity" (which a new government might see as an attempt to tie its hands) the approach eventually settled on was to ensure that the new administration would be given sufficient information on the present course, so as to make informed choices about its future direction: A line of action showing an unprecedented maturity of the Guatemalan democracy.

Sometimes, links between the macro-level and sector policies are strained: Sector authorities feel that they have not been sufficiently consulted when the PRS was formulated, and they may want to use their sector policy as a leverage to change the PRS. Donors may behave similarly: Where sector authorities disagree with aspects of the PRS, donors may be tempted to use the PRS (especially when they had considerable influence upon it) to force policy choices upon the sector authorities. Adding cross-cutting macro issues to the sector policy discussion (*eg* HIV/Aids, gender, environment, governance, public sector wide reforms and decentralisation) may enrich sector policies, but it may also reduce policy to a ritual.

In the JLP events, participants see the logic of developing the sector policy and planning the sector programme in the macro context. For some, this has been a real eye opener as was reported by the Zambia Water Sector in the tracer-survey, 6 months after the event: "Particularly valuable was that the participants of the event learned to look beyond the sector and learned to appreciate how sector-reforms relate to overall government priorities"

Toning down ambition to reality

Policy making needs to take account of the resources available to finance the policy, on the capacity available to implement it and on the political will to see it through. A broader sector and systems wide perspective should help take this into account – but the reality still tends to be different: Policies are still often written with little regard for whether the capacity and resources are there to implement them. It is possible that both government and donors feel that as long as the resource- and capacity-gap is identified, it can be filled. This has led to a situation however, where policies underpinning sector programmes and donor support tend to be wish-lists rather than affordable, doable policies. Government authorities seem reluctant to make hard choices and donor agencies are quite often accepting this. Although the sector approach views the policy and the budget as two sides of a coin, links between the two continue to be weak. This is especially prevalent where Ministries of Finance (and Planning where relevant) are not committed to a sector approach and are not actively participating at sector level.

Taking account of winners and losers

One JLP participant made the observation that "Good policies create winners and losers; bad policies attempt to only create winners" to illustrate the stalemate in Zambia's Environment sector where the policy process aimed to please all parties. Sector policies that include a privatisation of services have often seen remote, less commercially viable areas loose out. Policies that entail a reduction of state roles are often accompanied by a loss of government jobs. Where this is so, 'losers' should not be made (solely) responsible for implementation: In Kenya and Zambia, Ministries of Agriculture were made responsible for sector programmes that asked for a cutting down of their staff by about half. That these ministries dragged their feet over implementation should come as no surprise – turkeys don't vote for Christmas. Taking account of winners and losers is a challenging business: It requires that sector reform is seen not just as a technical, but also as a political process. But usually neither donor staff nor civil servants on non-executive levels are experienced in managing political processes where coalition-building, overcoming resistance and celebrating wins are key requirements for successful reform.

Sector wide policy alignment

Sector wide policies do not start from scratch. Often, a number of policies and acts exist that could begin to form the basis for a broader approach. Cobbling together a reasonably coherent policy framework can be one of the first steps towards a sector or sub-sector programme. The impetus for such an activity should come from the government appreciation that a broader and more aligned framework can contribute to a more constructive and coherent development. Naturally, the impetus for such an activity should not come from a donor who is in need of a sector policy framework as an anchor or the planned sector programme support; a situation that we still meet, occasionally, in JLP events.

The cobbling together of existing policies is not a straightforward task as is illustrated by Zambia Water and Tanzania Transport. In both cases the sector approach began by harmonising a series of overlapping and, in part, even contradicting, policies and acts (box 2). In defining the sector, account has to be taken of the existing policy frameworks so as not to overstretch the scope for harmonisation: multi-sectoral 'sectors' like rural development or private sector development, may well find themselves fall within the remit of nearly every second policy-act in the country. Policies may also be at odds with existing legislation that underpins its implementation. Sometimes, governments view the legislation as a last bastion that protects their power in the face of a policy that seeks to diminish it. Shortfalls in legal instruments are not necessarily brought to the policy dialogue table and are only uncovered when implementation stalls because of it. But legislation is neither changed quickly, nor should it be changed lightly.

Box 2 Zambia Water and Tanzania Transport

In the JLP events in Zambia and Tanzania, the central issue was how to align existing policies and harmonise the actions of the ministries that subscribe to these. In Zambia the Water Sector falls within three main policies; one of these is under the Ministry of Energy and Water Development; the other two are under the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. Though it was agreed that MEWD is responsible for water resource management and MLGH responsible for water supply this still results in considerable conflict at activity level: *eg* during the JLP both ministries claimed responsibility for borehole drilling. The event raised the willingness on both sides to resolve the policy-stalemate. JLP participants reported after the event that "important issues that the sector was struggling with for years were later resolved in an internal inter-ministerial meeting (without development partners)".

In Tanzania, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development has the mandate for transport policy, while the Prime Ministers Office for Regional Administration and Local Government is responsible for planning, development and maintenance of urban and rural roads. Further, there are a number of (semi)independent regulatory authorities and boards supporting the sector. Policy alignment is needed both horizontally between several policies and acts within the sector itself; and vertically between the transport sector and the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty. The JLP event pointed to the need for establishing a set of principles for setting policy priorities, negotiating between transport modes and developing a strategic framework that includes anticipated revenue and expenditure for the sector as a whole as an input into the planned 10 year Transport Sector Investment Programme.

Generalising the observations above, SWAps may run the risk of overestimating the capacity of development states to convert policies into practice. That is, the capacity may be sufficient for some basic policies (*eg* stable and low inflation, fiscal balance and other 'low implementation cost' policies), but things like getting poor girls to school *and* giving them a quality education may simply be beyond short term reach. Too strong a focus on policy in SWAPs therefore, may risk, nearly by default, overextending the state, basing itself on ambitions and assumptions about policy effectiveness which are unrealistic.

5. Public Financial Management

We can't have budget support and meet the MDGs!

Participant from Laos

The budget, and how it is converted into spending, is a crucial cornerstone of SWAps. The basic idea is convincingly simple: Since policies demand resources, then a unified and transparent process of allocating scarce resources, their effective spending and the accounting for the use of them, are crucial for matching priorities to resources and thus ensure effective development. From this follows the importance of getting all funding on budget; including donor funding, no matter which modalities donors use. And from this stems the focus on PFM system issues, partly because a good enough allocation and spending system is required to achieve results, partly because donors have legitimate fiduciary concerns and are accountable to their taxpayers. They will only be willing to use national systems if these systems have a basic minimum quality and are improving.

Added to this is the drive for Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks (or MTEFs): A one-year horizon is clearly too short, so why not extend it to 3-5 years so as to be able to extend the horizon of policies, including their medium term costs – and why not focus the budgets on outcomes in addition to traditional line item budgeting?

This has been the philosophy underpinning the role of PFM and MTEF issues in SWAp. We are not questioning the basics of this philosophy, but there are qualifications to be made and work to be done before the budget and the PFM issues have found their place in SWAps.

Putting the budget back to the centre of planning! …. But should we?!

In practice, many actors in the sectors (both donor and government staff) still have to come to terms with the essential notion of public budgets and public budget processes. There seem to be two basic reasons for this state of affairs:

First, the formal public budget is *de facto* not very important in many sectors or many countries. If the biggest slice of the budget is tied to salaries, and if most investment and operational costs come either through donors or through successful lobbying for cash during the budget year, then the idea of the centrality of the budget is distant from actual practice. This is true even if donor funds are channelled through the budget: If the "real" funding negotiations have anyway taken place at sector level (often without involvement of the Ministry of Finance), then the subsequent inclusion of donor funds in the budget is more window-dressing than it is part of a budget bargaining process. In the Cambodia JLP, an issue brought forward was that line ministries will only get their budget 5-6 months into the fiscal year. Whether they get something before that depends apparently largely on the communication and negotiation skills of individual ministries. The formal budget process is thus still not credible, despite a (reportedly relatively successful) PFM-reform programme which precisely tries to achieve a robust and credible budget process.

Another reason for the lack of 'buy-in' to the notion of the budget as a central planning tool is that many sector specialists (devoted water engineers, teachers, environmentalists) are much more interested in their subjects than in money issues. In the JLP, we meet quite surprising levels of 'budget blindness' among all participants, but we also get good feedback praising that the event made the importance of budget and finance management clear.

How appropriate is the traditional SWAP focus on budgets, PFM and MTEF?

In part, SWAps and the programme approach more generally were a response to the collapse of national institutions, especially institutions and systems of public finance management. Much as the breakdown of such structures is a cause for continued weakness, when looking at the development of a sector as a whole, some qualifications need to be made with respect to the 'traditional' SWAp-focus on budgets, PFM and MTEF.

First, the role of the budget (and of public resources) is different in different sectors: In traditional 'spending sectors' (e.g. education, health, security and infrastructure) the budget is undoubtedly the place where major priorities should be expressed. But in sectors where the quality of the regulatory framework is more the issue than state-organised service delivery (*eg* productive sectors, environment and trade) the budget is much less the key vehicle for translating policies into practice. The failure to recognise this difference may be one reason why SWAps are often perceived as state-centred[7].

Box 3 A budget for a Water and Sanitation Sector?

In Ethiopia, the Water, Hygiene and Sanitation (WASH) sector involves the ministries of Water, Health and Education, who have signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the joint objectives they want to achieve, and the formal coordination framework that they wish to establish. The JLP offered a platform for discussing how to apply a SWAp to this sector.

However, during the event it quickly became clear that it will not make much sense to look for a joint budget framework and budget process for this "sector" which is a combination of sub-sectors (or less) of the three ministries. A joint projection of resource needs and resource availability for the different stakeholders in the short and medium term would be appropriate, but it would have to be operationally managed as an integrated part of the budgets and budget processes of the individual agencies.

Added to this is the fact that Ethiopia is a federal state where regions and districts receive block grants which are not allocated sector-wise. While budgets and budget processes are still central to a SWAp in the WASH sector, it will clearly not be one "sector budget" or one sector budget process that will be the focus or indeed should be the objective.

Second, the budget for a sector programme may not encompass the whole sector or the whole mandate of the lead institution, and it may cut across various agencies without covering all of their mandates. This is the case for the Water and Sanitation Sector in Ethiopia, cutting

[7] This also led to the widespread perception that SWAps are better suited for 'public-sector heavy' sectors as education and health. We disagree with this: SWAps that overlook balances between service delivery and regulation, and between public and private sector roles, may do less damage in education and health than in agriculture, but they are poor in both cases.

across health, water and local government institutions. Focusing on a 'sector programme budget' and establishing a donor-partner dialogue about this budget may entail difficult coordination processes with the 'fundamental' budget processes, which typically (and sensibly) centres on organisations, rather than on programmes. A strong drive from a Sector Programme to discuss 'its' budget could further distort basic budget processes, especially where these are weak.

Third, the focus by donors on budgets and PFM often has a strictly technocratic orientation, displaying a rather naïve perception of budget processes as rational, orderly prioritisation processes between non-conflicting policies pursuing apolitical poverty reduction goals. Having a discourse about budgets and PFM so far away from the power-loaded and conflict-ridden fights about budgets and resources is hardly intellectually or operationally convincing.

Fourth, PFM issues can only to a certain degree be addressed from a sector perspective. There are several things to be attended to internally in sectors, but the basic quality of the PFM systems and the political and technical PFM processes are government-wide and can only to a limited degree be addressed from a sector perspective. This may be good news if it were an incentive for sectors to put pressure on central government to get its act together. However, stronger PFM systems also mean stronger Ministry of Finance control, something that may represent more of a disincentive to sector staff.

Fifth, the centrality of the budget and the requirement for donors to 'come on-budget' is based on the premise that funding is sufficiently predictable for a budget to make sense. Unfortunately, evaluations indicate that donor disbursements are not very predictable[8], a feature causing less harm for 'stand alone' projects than when the funding is taken into the budget and thus expected to cover politically vital expenditures such as salaries; or key operational non-salary recurrent costs.

Finally, there is an ongoing and not yet conclusive discussion internationally about the merits of MTEFs in the context of weak PFM capacity which is typically found in many SWAp-engaged sectors. While a medium or long term perspective is necessary to estimate e.g. recurrent cost implications of policies and investments, it has long been argued[9] that an MTEF is only likely to work when the basic annual budget system is in place. A 3-5 year perspective may also be too short for solid projections of affordability. Some donors are reconsidering their earlier enthusiasm for MTEFs, notably the EC[10].

In the JLP events, we have seen very rudimentary 'MTEFs' which, due to their weakness, may run the risk of giving a rather dangerous illusion of a medium term perspective where there is really none – and sector MTEFs which are not linked to global MTEFs often turn out to be wish-lists rather than instruments for medium term prioritization against hard budget ceilings.

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[8] See also Lawson et al, 2005 and the OECD-DAC, 2006

[9] DAC 2006

[10] The updated EC Guidelines for Support to Sector Programmes will have lower expectations to and demands for sector MTEFs. See also *Strategic Budgeting and sector support: a technical note in support of the EC guidance on SPSPs* of December 2006

The above qualifications listed, PFM issues continue to be of crucial importance in the SWAp, and, hence, in the JLP events. But it is time to adopt a realist approach less influenced by a strongly normative stance (MTEF, idealistic models of the budget/policy links in the best of all worlds), and more based on adapting dialogue and reform plans to country conditions[11] , as well as capacity and willingness to change.

[11] Schick, 1998

6. Institutions and capacities

Capacity development is strongly on the agenda in SWAps. All agree that it is crucially important; the whole idea of the move from projects to programmatic aid is to strengthen national systems and capacities. From this positive starting point the challenges in the sector programmes are building up: What is capacity development beyond technical assistance (TA) and training? Is capacity development about organisations, individuals or even about societies? How can a government best develop its own capacity, and should sectors or should cross cutting agencies take the lead? How can donors, who traditionally supply TA and training individually, join forces and harmonize their approaches? Or even align to national capacity development efforts where these exist?

In the JLP events, we meet such conceptual and operational questions. Capacity development is not the elephant in the room that nobody wants to discuss, but it is the strange animal in the room that everybody wants to domesticate, without many handles on how to do this.

Capacity development: Sub-component or overall thrust of a SWAP?

We use a fairly operational approach to capacity development, following the EC concept paper on this subject (Europe Aid, 2005). This approach focuses on organisations in their wider context and on the outputs they produce, adding both a functional and a political economy perspective on diagnosis and change. The approach emphasises that capacity development happens as much due to external pressure for performance as it does because of internal efforts to change. This approach has strengths and limitations in the JLP context:

In the JLP events, the focus is most often on the “narrower” capacity of sector organisations to perform their functions, including service delivery and regulatory services. However, in practice, the capacity challenge is not confined to implementation of policies. In fact, the SWAp is about strengthening capacity to make policies; to plan and subsequently allocate resources according to plan; to implement plans and policies; to monitor; and to coordinate with national stakeholders and external partners.

Thus, capacity is both the overall thrust of the SWAp in terms of developing sector capacity; as it is a separate component of the SWAp, focussing on specific areas important for programme implementation. This is confusing, even if patiently explained!

The need to mainstream capacity development in policies and programmes

In weakly performing sectors, freshly embarking on a SWAp, the capacity to implement policy may be very low. This suggests that a major orientation of the sector policy and programme should be on how to develop sector capacity; otherwise noble pro-poor policies will remain distant dreams. But even in such cases, capacity development is sometimes seen as something ‘outside’ the policy and the programme (as well as outside the budget, for that matter) but as more of an ‘add-on’ after the programme has been formulated. However, the weaker the capacity in a sector to actually implement whatever policy, the more the policy should focus on constructing that capacity, but that is not an understanding we meet in JLP events.

Where the mainstreaming of capacity development is a problem, this may yet be overcome by a dialogue between partners on strategies for strengthening capacity in parallel to sector programme implementation. Unfortunately, this appears to be a difficult exercise:

- First, discussing capacity issues is sensitive as soon as it moves beyond superficial observations. Donors may feel they have a lot to say, while sector authorities may not necessarily want to lend them an ear; especially where mutual trust is compromised;
- Second, the absence of a joint capacity development component in the sector programme makes it all too easy for donors to fall back on the familiar, but largely inefficient supply-driven TA and training;
- Third, and related to the above, individual donors' motives for fielding TA may be linked more to ensuring effective implementation of their funding than be linked to capacity development as such;
- Fourth, neither sector authorities nor donor staff are generally aware of basic issues about organisational development and change management; and few, on both sides, have hands-on experience of managing capacity development and change processes.

Having said this, a positive point of departure is the growing awareness of the need to address capacity issues. The challenge is to find demand-driven, harmonised ways of doing so (box 4).

Box 4 Multisector, sector and local capacity building efforts in Rwanda

To ensure that resources mobilized under aid and technical cooperation programmes are efficiently and effectively utilized, the Rwanda Government has initiated a long term and strategic multi sector capacity building programme encompassing strategic human resource development; improving institutional investment; public sector pay reform; integrated capacity and performance improvement in the ministries and agencies; knowledge management and introduction of e-Government. Legislation has been passed endorsing the establishment of the Human Resources and Institutional Development Agency (HIDA) that coordinates and manages the programme.

At the same time, various sector programmes (justice, agriculture, health) are integrating CD activities. And, as part of the decentralisation policy, a crosscutting district capacity development initiative is underway. It is still too early to assess the individual merits and the overall efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of the different approaches. The JLP event in June 2006 revealed that coordination and co-operation between the different initiatives still was a challenge.

Decentralisation

The SWAp is often accused of being a centralising approach, strengthening a vertical sector approach and weakening territorial approaches that emphasise local autonomy and local government mandates. We meet similar sentiments in the JLP events; the simple fact that SWAp processes are concentrated in capitals and are often dominated by sector authorities is a strong indication of this direction. Though we always suggest that local government representatives be included in the events, this does not always happen.

On the other side, balancing the vertical sector approach and the horizontally integrated territorial approach has been a key issue in several JLPs, most clearly spelled out in Rwanda and Ethiopia. These events saw very interesting and lively discussions about the relation between sector and local level funding, about the merits and dangers of targeted funding versus non-targeted, and about the budget- and non-budget means of balancing the top-down policy concerns with bottom-up concerns about ensuring a fit to local conditions (box 5).

Box 5 Fiscal decentralisation in Rwanda and Ethiopia

The JLP event in Rwanda was a multi-sector event combining several (vertical) sectors (health, agriculture and justice) with a SWAp in decentralisation, which led to a very fruitful exchange. In fact, the challenge of aligning SWAp for sectors with a SWAp for districts became a central theme of the event. Vertical sector staff were worried how a decentralisation SWAp would effect their sector policy implementation and wondered whether decentralisation could be a sector at all. District mayors, on the other hand, were concerned about the parallel implementation of sector SWAps at district level and hoped that the decentralisation-SWAp could bring coherence there. The group found that ongoing fiscal decentralisation policies had to be matched to planned district capacity programmes, and that the budget calendar might have to be reconsidered to enable the "meeting" between bottom-up local government prioritisations and top-down sector policies.

Ethiopia presents a different but no less challenging position regarding the reconciliation of vertical and horizontal processes. JLP participants were concerned about how to implement the Water, Hygiene and Sanitation programme in a highly decentralised setting. Ethiopia is a federal state where regions receive un-earmarked block grants and the state has little say in how they spend it. Most funding in the WASH sector still bypasses these block grants (mostly via donor programmes and projects, but endorsed and encouraged by the sector authorities). However, when funding is pooled and channelled through national systems the question becomes how central level policy directives and targets can influence decision making at regional level without compromising regions' autonomy to adapt to local development priorities? A number of 'policy transmission' mechanisms emerged from the discussions including: Ex-ante tied grants; ex-post verification of spending as a basis for future funding (conditionality); legal instruments requiring regions to meet certain service targets; negotiation between central and regional level to influence voluntary spending; and consumer pressure as demand for policy implementation.

As box 5 demonstrates, the central government faces dilemmas similar to those of the donors: if the local governments get 'general budget support', how can the central government then ensure that sector priorities are adhered to? If they give ‘sector budget support’ to the local government – earmarking certain funds to e.g. education – how can the central government ensure that the local government does not engage in fungibility, shifting un-earmarked funds which would otherwise have been used for education to other priorities? If local government capacity is weak, should central government then maintain control over certain projects to ensure that critical service delivery is not compromised, knowing that it thereby risks undermining capacity development of the local government?

It is helpful in the JLP events that we focus on the decentralisation issue as such; the balance between local autonomy and central steering, the means for keeping this balance and the various instruments that can be used to manage the balance, rather than having a narrow focus on donors’ support to the sector and to decentralisation, respectively.

7. Accountability and monitoring

In the JLP, we group 'accountability and monitoring' together in a single heading. This is accepted practice also in other models of sector diagnosis based on the premise that one of the purposes of monitoring is to be (or to be held) accountable. However, that is not the only reason for monitoring: Others include (i) as a means towards results-based management; (ii) to provide learning-oriented feedback to policy-makers; or (iii) to collect data related to indicators agreed between government and donors in relation to funding commitments. Therefore, despite the crucial link between monitoring and accountability, we believe that it is important also to address them separately. Below, we will first discuss accountability and then turn to monitoring.

Domestic accountability

Domestic accountability entered into SWAp thinking via the so-called 'virtuous' circles or accountability triangles between policymakers, service-providers and clients or citizens. By working within country systems, through local actors, and adopting local procedures, support to SWAps would no longer undermine such accountability structures (as projects had been accused of) but instead reinforce those systems by placing reliance on them.

However, whether domestic accountability, i.e. the accountability from government towards service users or citizens in general, has been strengthened is questionable. SWAps have in practice focused strongly on fiscal accountability (PFM systems) and on verification of pro-poor sector outcomes. Progress towards the MDGs still occupies centre stage in donors' minds. This may be justified from other perspectives, but neither the focus on PFM or on the MDGs strengthens downward, domestic accountability structures. Squarely put, elections are won on progress as perceived by citizens, not on progress as documented by statistics and indicators. Anti-corruption is on nearly every candidate's pre-election agenda, but the technical intricacies of PFM are unlikely to win many votes.

Auditor generals' reports (often late) and statistical surveys (often abstract and difficult to understand) are rarely part of the armoury of citizens calling their governments to account. While donors eagerly focus on strengthening expenditure controls and internal audits as part of SWAps, they are less insistent in demanding that exact budgets to schools be published to parents. Simply put, donors tend to focus on upwards and homewards accountability, rather than on messy and difficult domestic processes.

Added to this is the 'curse of aid'[12] which refers to the fact that aid, like oil and other non-tax sources of income, weakens the incentives for strengthening (or creating) a 'social contract' between citizens and the state, where citizens pay taxes in return for security and services. Where government salaries and services are paid by aid rather than by tax-payers and service users, the aid provided effectively removes government away from the people it

[12] See also Djankov et al. 2005, OECD-DAC-2006 and Mwenda 2006

is meant to serve. Thus, if donors don't want to be part of the problem they have to take account of their own impact on domestic accountability.

Strengthening the demand for accountability

SWAps tend to promote (willingly or unwillingly) a rather supply-driven notion of how to strengthen accountability: Pro-poor policies are funded; money is pumped through the system by strengthening the PFM-engine; and monitoring ensures that the plan is constantly improved as it rolls forward (the policy-plan-result loop). Making this work assumes that a government's prime interest is to be a servant of its people, even if that same people is not consulted on policies, do not actively demand services and are not being informed about results and money spent. If ever, such truly altruistic governments never exist for long.

Thus, SWAps need to create more room to service users to hold service providers to account, whether these are from the public or the private sector. Efforts are being made to give user groups more of a voice (parent and teacher boards; commodity associations; customer report cards) and stakeholder platforms are part of many SWAps. More consideration should be given to options to give user groups control over funds to pay for services which are likely to be a much more effective way towards accountability. An example discussed in a JLP event was that of the 'smart-cards' used in Malawi whereby personalised 'credit' cards can be accredited with money; a certain value of goods (fertiliser, seeds) or value of services (health, education etc) that can be exchanged for the real thing at any service provider with a battery powered 'card reader'[13].

How mutual is mutual accountability?

Mutual accountability as pursued by the Paris Declaration works two ways; from donors to partner countries and back. At the level of the SWAp, this usually translates in a commitment to predictable, reliable and transparent fund flow from the donor and the achievement of a jointly agreed level of sector performance by the partner country.

However, whereas donors can use conditionality to hold partners accountable, aid-dependent partners have no such stick-and-carrot instrument. Donor accountability within the SWAp has to come out of agreements like Memoranda of Understanding; peer-pressure from other donors as well as donors own discipline. For this to work effectively, donors need sufficient flexibility and autonomy to respond to the country-context. Where donor representatives are pushed more by their head-offices than they are pulled by the partner institutions they are meant to support, then accountability lines upwards will dominate those downward and much scope for trust and mutual accountability is lost.

[13] Use of smart-cards in Malawi is established as major tobacco companies use it to pay their employees. Their use as a targeted provision of subsidised fertiliser by the Ministry of Agriculture is supported by the EC.

Monitoring and Dialogue

Monitoring has been an area where joined-up approaches have been achieved, between government and donors, and amongst donors. Joint sector performance reviews and joint (sector) performance assessment frameworks have helped strengthen mutual accountability between donors and government, especially where these also contain donor performance indicators (e.g. in Mozambique). Joint reviews are one of the most common features of SWAp that we meet in the JLPs. Common indicator frameworks such as Performance Assessment Frameworks (PAF) seem to address a real need: JLP participants from countries that do not have them are keen on getting examples from elsewhere to see how it is being done. An often observed risk however, is that 'common' is translated into 'cumulative', which leads to PAFs suffering from an indicator overload. This should be avoided as it not only ties-up and over-stretches capacities, but it also represents an unacceptable level of transaction costs (box 6).

Performance monitoring at sector level is generally intended to serve two purposes: (i) informing policy makers and (ii) accountability. The former purpose, sometimes referred to as 'monitoring for learning' is an important input in the policy dialogue. The latter, monitoring for accountability, is mostly done as part of the condition for continued sector support.

It is important to distinguish between the two, as rolling them into one creates problems[14]: Where performance monitoring indicators are used both for 'learning' as well as for 'triggers' towards aid disbursement then this creates the risk of data being tampered with to meet disbursement targets, as was mentioned by JLP participants. This clearly would undermine the data, let alone any learning done from them.

Yet, the SWAp is very much about learning-by-doing and getting it right in the long (not short) term. To enable this take place, donors and governments have to decide how monitoring can serve both objectives. Examples discussed in the JLP included using different indicators for different purposes (outcome indicators for dialogue; process or output indicators for conditionality); to have dialogue and conditionality discussions at different points in time or with different actors and to use independent monitoring institutions as a half-way house between donors and governments (e.g. the Quality Assurance Group in Mozambique).

A further concern related to conditionality reported from partner countries is that where certain indicators are used as money triggers two things may happen: (i) the available and often limited capacity of statistical institutions may end up being mobilised predominantly around these indicators and (ii) governments may bias their attention towards achieving those outcomes that are disbursement conditions at the cost of other objectives, e.g. government focus on social spending when they prefer to invest in growth (Uganda) or government builds primary schools when they actually want to renovate secondary ones (Namibia).

[14] See also Lawson, 2005

Box 6 Indicator overloads

Mozambique's ProAgri-Phase I (1999-2004) never translated its policy into indicators and targets. This of course made monitoring very difficult and little effort was made to establish such a system. ProAgri II (2004-2009) represents the agricultural pillar of Mozambique's PRS and as such is monitored as part of the PRS according to sector specific indicators. The PRS-II had identified 130 indicators, of which nine were from agriculture. This was brought down to 40, with three from agriculture. However, all three indicators relate to outcomes, such as yield and land titles, but are less useful in evaluating the quality of ProAgri as a programme. A separate annual report by the Ministry of Agriculture presents indicators on the ministry's performance but it remains difficult to establish a causality link between public investment under Pro-Agri and changes at outcome and impact levels in the agriculture sector.

While there was an indicator overload in Mozambique, colleagues in Uganda started with the opposite: The Secretariat for the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) set about the task of designing an M&E system and found that in the entire PMA document there was only one clear target (reduction of poverty to under 10% by 2017). The first attempt at an M&E framework had over 100 indicators; this was brought down to 89 and is at 34 at present.

Monitoring systems and Results Based Management

'SWAp-orthodoxy' had it that monitoring should focus on outcomes rather than inputs, activities or outputs, which was, in part, meant to keep donors at arm's length from implementation. Today, we find a more nuanced view: Although outcomes are what counts, they materialise slowly and are the product of too many exogenous factors to be adequate for shorter term sector strategy management adjustments. In fact, PFM systems are process carriers and donors have never let their eyes off this part of the sector machinery. Similarly, the focus on timely and reliable availability of resources represents a focus on inputs. Thus, monitoring can make use of any type of indicators from inputs to outcomes (even impacts) as long as the type of indicator is linked to the purpose for which the information is collected: Outcome indicators may indicate whether the long-term policy is right; while strategic and management decisions can be based on output indicators.

SWAp countries and sectors tend to have weak monitoring systems and statistical institutions and comprehensive baseline data is often lacking. The present push for Management for Development Results (MfDR) emphasizes building statistical capacity and links the achievement of results to the existence of monitoring systems. In the JLP, we increasingly meet this coupling between MfDR and monitoring. It is worthwhile to raise some concern about this strengthened push for monitoring, because (as is so often the case when donors develop single issue task forces) there seems to be a risk that there will be an excessive focus on monitoring *systems*, with corresponding soft and hardware, data input requirements from local levels, processing centres etc. This may replace a focus on the day-to-day managerial information required to deliver results. Such a monitoring system may inform policy choices, but if policies are for a host of reasons still only of limited effectiveness, then comprehensive monitoring systems which tend to assume their own independent life may do little good. For SWAps, good basic management information often seems in woefully short supply, and getting the basics right may do as much good as a focus on grand monitoring schemes.

8. Harmonisation, Alignment and Modalities

As far as I am concerned, budget support is donors in the bedroom.

PS Finance, Uganda

The Paris Agenda visibly matters; it has provided an unprecedented push for harmonisation and alignment (H&A). The JLP events often become a platform for creating additional awareness and for building up momentum towards H&A commitments. In addition, they offer a platform for peer exchange about good and not so good practices. On several occasions, JLP events have functioned as a trigger for more pro-active coordination within government and a more determined and confident coordination of development partners. This is particularly the case where governments have actively pursued the Paris-agenda at national level (Rwanda, Nicaragua). A joint commitment to the agenda, based on a shared understanding of its implications, both for government business and for the relations to development partners, is fundamental to government maintaining its share of the lead (box 7).

Box 7 Nicaragua and Rwanda: Piloting the Paris Declaration

Both Nicaragua and Rwanda are pilot countries for the implementation of the Paris Declaration. In each of these countries, the JLP event found clear government commitment to and significant progress in the SWAp process. Government staff was well-versed in concept and terminology, both at the sector and the central level. In Nicaragua the Ministry of Finance had ready made presentations on MTEF and harmonisation issues and the Minister of Health had personal knowledge on SWAps and encouraged JLP participants to pursue the approach. The government had prepared a Code of Conduct for the health sector to coordinate the donors. Government-led dialogue was on-going to improve and maintain coordination, but also met difficulties when a strike among health staff paralysed the sector for months. The coordination process could benefit from absorbing more technical content and hard evidence; and by linking the meetings more clearly to decision making and action.

In Rwanda, impressive sector progress was observed in education, health, justice and agriculture. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED) is a well-informed and powerful driver of the harmonisation and alignment agenda. Integrated in the MFED is the Aid Coordination Unit (funded by development partners). Projects are gradually being absorbed in broader sector frameworks via a so-called ‘retro-fitting’ process. Existing projects are being as flexible as possible, financing broader sector programme components whilst new projects are increasingly aligned with strategic plans and adopting co-financing arrangements.

Both in Nicaragua and Rwanda, the constructive impetus for harmonisation and alignment that originated from cross-sectoral ministries was crucial. Sectors cannot make it alone!

Donors alone won't make it!

Where there is no joint commitment and shared understanding, the onus to pursue the Paris agenda is placed largely in the hands of development partners. This appears to entail risks: If government is not effectively on board, then the alignment-agenda tends to either disappear or cause frictions between donors, with those who are prepared to pursue more aligned modalities on one side and those who are not on the other. In other words, when the H&A agenda is pursued by donors alone, they most likely will end up fighting about, rather than reconciling their differences. In one event, a senior government participant claimed that he was fed up with brokering endless conflicts between donors, who each tried to use him and his colleagues as weapons in their internal struggles.

This demonstrates the enormous challenges of making coordination work in settings with numerous independent or semi-independent actors who are not subject to a single hierarchical authority commanding each one and all of them together.

Donor coordination is crowding out sector coordination

The sheer complexity of the H&A agenda in aid-dependent countries with double-digit donor-numbers entails another risk: The efforts to coordinate donors may end up crowding out the efforts to coordinate the domestic sector players. In the narrower aid effectiveness perspective, the focus on donor coordination is logical. In the broader sector development perspective that we advocate, it is important that domestic sector coordination comes first, and that donor coordination is seen in the perspective of this wider issue: How can donors, through their behaviour, strengthen the domestic sector coordination which fosters sector effectiveness, sector governance and accountability – and, therefore, aid effectiveness?

This may sound rather self-evident, but in practice we have seen several examples where a donor-government forum is inserted as a line function typically between a Minister or Permanent Secretary and his/her senior civil servants. As if the minister/PS, each time he or she would communicate to his/her system, should pass through a forum with donors around!

Another tendency, especially where multiple donors are present in the sector, is to create coordination structures for the sake of……having co-ordination structures! The logic of the SWAp, i.e. inclusive, comprehensive, holistic, invites the formation of huge consultative committees, intra-sectoral commissions, coordination secretariats, sub-groups, task forces etc. Some of these are perfectly justified, but others end up with a life of their own and no clear purpose.

We find it useful to recall with participants that government (like any organisation) has to find the balance between its division of labour and the coordination between these divisions; and that this is a classical management problem. This underlines that sector coordination, harmonisation and alignment is a huge *managerial* challenge, and therefore needs very close and careful attention. Coordination structures decided lightly, but not backed actively by senior managers in government and aid agencies, will simply not work.

Coordination is time and labour intensive…..

Coordination requires time, and increases what is popularly referred to as 'transaction costs' i.e. the time required in the delivery of aid. Some transaction costs, linked to the fragmented processing of individual donor projects, should of course decrease through the advent of a SWAp. There are cases (reported also in the JLP) where the time of senior officials and ministers is simply abused by donors and donor missions. However, good donor coordination under a SWAp does cost a lot of time on both sides: The lead donor (DFID) in the agriculture sector in Uganda estimated that 40% of his time was spent on coordination, while senior civil servants mentioned coordination duties as a main pressure on their time.

Harmonised approaches should ensure that the worst of inefficiencies become history, but there are few indications that the overall so-called transaction costs will diminish. Without elaborating the full argument, we suggest that this is because 'good coordination' costs are not 'wasteful' transaction costs, but necessary and often underestimated contributions to performance in aid dependent sectors. In most developed countries, the spending of millions of euros in a sector will usually require numerous staff, an elaborate managerial structure etc. There is no reason to assume that this should be any different in a developing country or in the aid industry as such.

…..yet, coordination can be done much more effectively

Accepting the fact that coordination is time-consuming calls for efforts to make it work more efficiently, rather than to make it go away. The JLP events demonstrate that there is a lot of room for improvement in this area, including:

- Distinguish between forums and mechanisms for information sharing, consulting, brainstorming, bargaining/negotiation, conflict resolution, formalisation etc. – each requires different participants, settings and processes;

- Enhance the negotiation and conflict resolution skills both among development partners and domestic partners. The JLP events in Zambia, Yemen and Rwanda all offered a stage at which conflict was discussed (and sometimes played out). In several events, unresolved tensions between typically bilateral and multilateral donors also point to this need;

- Be more business-like in the coordination processes, by paying more attention to basic practical issues like preparing agendas, managing participation, managing meetings, ensuring minutes and follow up - etc.

Making coordination processes work efficiently and ensuring that they create value is a huge, but also a core challenge in SWAps. Not least development partners walk an extremely fine line: When do donors push too much in moving a process? And when do they insist too much on focussing attention to certain content issues? Important as these questions are; equally important is to consider *how* to move the process, or how to get an issue on the agenda. This requires extreme role-awareness and sensitivity.

Sector authorities may erroneously have been led to believe that the SWAp would mean that donors would stay at arms length and that a couple of quarterly meetings and an annual joint review would be all there is to it. In well performing sectors with increasingly strong sector development management this may be the case. Elsewhere, donors will push for performance through a variety of mechanisms. If they do so efficiently and with a consistent sector development perspective in mind, then they are investing in development rather than incurring transaction costs.

Support Modalities: Ghost in the closet or donor in the bedroom?

In the JLP events, we empathetically stress that SWAp is not about disbursement modalities – that donors and governments can pursue the approach no matter which modality a donor ends up using. This does not imply that all modalities are equally well suited in support of different objectives in a sector programme – but everybody can have a seat at the table.

On some occasions there is a nearly audible sigh of relief when we stress that we are presenting an inclusive SWAp model. This does not remove the (sometimes annoyingly righteous) peer pressure that some donor staff tries to exert on other, purportedly less 'Paris-compliant' colleagues from other agencies. We stress that pointing fingers at others is rarely the most effective way of helping them to change – and that there is lot to be done with respect to H&A quite apart from funding modalities.

But defusing the modality "ghost" between donors in this way does not remove the other fear about SWAp and funding modalities that tends to come from sector authorities: that yes, they would welcome sector budget support – provided that the Ministry of Finance does not get the upper hand; that the sector will not be paralysed by dysfunctional government expenditure and procurement procedures; and that the sector can still reserve funds for those expenditures that tend to be cut away from the budget in times of shortage. And yes, sector budget support is fine provided that donors stay at arms length and let the government decide, and provided it does not mean that donors gang up and demand insight in everything and use their combined power to twist the arm of government. So, budget support is acceptable, provided that it does not undermine or destabilise the budget of the sector.

The donor arguments for budget support follow a different logic: Budget support is good precisely because it enables more transparency; it allows for the full picture to be discussed and fungibility, duplications and voids to be eliminated. It also allows a focus on sector wide results, whilst at the same time requiring hard budget ceilings to be respected, formal budget priorities to be followed through during execution, and a good enough PFM system, curbing leakages, waste and corruption.

We try to use the events to bridge between these two different perceptions about the implications of alignment and of the budget support modality. Though not an easy discussion, it is a necessary one as it helps to maintain the sector development perspective on the SWAp: There is no point in having donors in the bedroom, but there is a point in ensuring that government is scrutinized by its own citizens and by checks- and balances institutions created for that purpose. Donors should apply this perspective to their actions.

9 Sectors where the state is primarily a regulator

The government is criticised for over-regulation and it is criticised for under-regulation. Can anyone tell us what ideal regulation is?

Participant from Kenya

One of the perceptions of SWAp implementation has been that this approach worked best in sectors that are characterised by high public investment and where government is the main service provider. Also, SWAps seems easier to apply within a coherent institutional framework linked to the area of budget responsibility of a single ministry. Early programmes in agriculture bogged down in disagreements over the role of the state or because of the sheer unmanageability of maintaining consensus and coordinating actions involving multiple ministries. And so, before long, the reputation of agriculture and related sectors became such that popular wisdom declared them as less-SWAp-able; the odd-ones out; the unruly sectors.

Whether these sectors are truly unruly, or whether the classical SWAp sectors of education and health will ultimately turn out to be the odd ones out remains to be seen. As we are spreading the programme-based gospel, experiences and realisations accumulate that government is only one player, even in high public investment sectors; that no sector is a closed entity and that much of what constitutes sector development will always be outside the mandate of a single lead ministry. Even in health and education half or more of all services may be delivered by non-state providers[15]. In the Ethiopia JLP it was estimated that as much as 20% of services in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sector are provided by NGOs.

SWAps and agriculture: The shoe that doesn't fit?

The SWAp concept got into trouble in agriculture because the role of the state is small compared that of other players. The role of the state is largely limited to providing an enabling environment. Agricultural growth depends more on private than it does on public investment; while the public investment that is needed (*eg* in infrastructure) is only partially under the responsibility of the sector ministry.

Agricultural Programmes generally do acknowledge the importance of non-state actors. To help non-state actors take on their responsibilities, activities such as strengthening farmers' associations, capacity development of NGOs or training of private service providers were foreseen in a number of programmes. However, financing of the SWAp is (predominantly) through the public budget, which led to a situation where even if support to non-state actors was foreseen, it proved difficult to get money out of the public budget to that end. Instead, ministries tended to view the SWAp as 'their' public expenditure programme and so the SWAp became to be more about 'What the Ministry of Agriculture does' than about 'what the agriculture sector needs'[16].

[15] van Reesch, 2007; Foster et. al. 2000
[16] Evans et al. 2006

Another feature of the SWAp that proved less successful in agriculture was the idea of 'scaling up'; In relatively homogenous sectors like health and education, the SWAp offered a useful framework for joining up and scaling up hitherto fragmented (project) islands of support. Much as the fragmentation of aid was a problem in agriculture too, scaling up proved much more difficult due to the heterogeneous nature of the sector. Successful interventions are those that are tailored to local environmental, economic and even climate factors and they cannot easily be isolated as a 'good practice' and be up-scaled into a 'programme'.

How wide is the sector?

Even when the focus was still on agriculture, programmes tended to bulge and include an ever growing range of activities under the mandate of other ministries than agriculture. The first Kenyan Agriculture Sector Programme ground to a halt trying to coordinate 11 ministries. The current programme tries to keep things at a manageable level but the JLP event there showed how difficult that is. Before the event was over, the PS Agriculture had invited six other Permanent Secretaries maintaining that they all had to be in the programme.

Currently, at least in Africa, programmes that may have started as clearly defined to agriculture have evolved into wider rural growth oriented programmes even if coordination is still under the Ministry of Agriculture. More recently, programmes emerge that start off from a rural development focus with stewardship by local authorities rather than a line ministry. Where an agriculture programme ends and a rural development one begins is a distinction often difficult to make (box 8).

Box 8 Programmes on the scale between Agriculture and Rural Development

Even if it were possible to draw a clear line between agriculture and rural development per se, this delineation immediately blurs when we look at the programmes in these sectors as many operate on the interface between the two: On one side of the spectrum are the programmes with a more narrow agriculture focus: ProAgri in Mozambique and the Agricultural Services Sub-Sector Investment Programme (AgSSIP) in Ghana are concerned predominantly with service provision and institutional development under the Ministry of Agriculture. Examples of programmes 'in the middle' are the Kenyan Strategy for the Revitalisation of Agriculture (SRA) and Uganda's Programme for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA): Both these programmes emphasise agricultural growth but include many rural development components. Programmes on the rural development end of the spectrum include the Rural Development Strategies of Niger and Burkina Faso; both are rural development programmes in the widest sense, involving a great many actors and incorporating a strong element of decentralisation. Therefore, rather than there being a clear dividing line between programmes in agriculture and in rural development, there is a sliding scale with few agriculture programmes on one side and few rural development programmes on the other, whilst the majority of programmes are hovering somewhere in between.

The question 'How wide is the sector?' is a problematic one for all programmes on this scale, but all the more pronounced nearer to the rural development end where delineation of the programme is a major stumbling block especially for Rural Development Programmes. Delineation of the budget and associated SWAp building blocks likes MTEF are subsequent problems. The idea of a single budget framework or a single sector MTEF as the basis for an sector wide programme in agriculture or in rural development will risk setting up artificial structures and systems that sit askance to the fundamental administrative and budget frameworks which are usually based on organisations and actors, rather than on programmes.

Translating the sector policy into complementary (sector) programmes

In fact, any attempt to translate a rural development or even an agriculture sector policy into a single programme will likely lead to institutional logjam. A more practical way forward may be a set of complementary programmes (programme-pillars or –components). Each should be coherent enough to generate momentum and sufficiently autonomous to be implemented independently. Individual (sub)-programmes can be based on existing institutional, administrative and budget frameworks whilst coordination between them can still be done under a single policy framework. Where this is ensured, programme implementation can then be incremental, whereby certain sub-components or certain geographical regions that have built up more momentum can be allowed to progress and be used as stepping stones in the process. If, on the contrary, one component or region cannot move forward as long as others stay behind, the programme as a whole will suffer.

Supporting non-state actors

In productive sectors, support to non-state actors is crucial as these are responsible for most of the production achieved (and thus for sector outcome). An important part of this support will come from government by creating the frame conditions for growth (eg policy, regulation, legislation); by public investment (rural and market infrastructure); the outsourcing of government contracts; or the provision of business oriented extension and services. As it is a government responsibility to ensure that growth is pro-poor, remote areas or resource poor people may be targeted by subsidies and credits, as long as these do not undermine (emerging) private sector development (especially in disadvantaged areas).

Donors can support non-state actors within a SWAp context either indirectly or directly. Where ministries need to shift from service provider to becoming a facilitator (or contractor) of other service providers, then capacity building or exchange of experiences across sectors or countries may be activities that donors can usefully support. Direct support to non-state actors can usefully complement the support to government provided that it is within the spirit of the sector policy, in other words, that it is 'policy-compliant' and transparent. This can include support to CSOs, commodity associations, farmer unions, NGOs as well as commercial (small and medium scale) private entrepreneurs. As with any support to the private sector, donors should be careful to avoid creating uneven playing fields or unfair competition.

Of course, significant donor support is channelled to NGOs and the private sector on an ongoing basis already. However, much of this continues to be fragmented, not necessarily taking sector policy frameworks into account. The focus on government by SWAps has meant that not many efforts have been spent to get such support on-board or compliant with sector policy. In Uganda, sector policy-compliance is a condition for activities in the agriculture sector and any intervention is screened by government before it is approved (box 9).

Box 9 'Policy compliance' as a coordinating tool in Uganda and Kenya agriculture

With agriculture and rural development being as wide as they are, it is not possible to capture all that is needed and all that is being done in these sectors in a single programme or budget framework. What is needed, however, is that different efforts, whether by government, donors or NGOs, do not undermine each other. Thus, in Uganda the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) set out a series of principles and guidelines that interventions in rural development was asked to abide by; only those that were PMA 'compliant' were allowed. Any intervention in the sector has to pass the PMA Secretariat where it is being screened. According to one of the Secretariat members, on average one third of applications are send back to the drawing board on the ground of not complying with policy

After hearing of this during the (pilot) JLP event in Kenya, it was immediately proposed as a useful coordination tool for the agriculture sector there. This has meanwhile been taken up and at present the Agriculture Sector Coordinating Unit (ASCU) is screening all ongoing and planned interventions against their compliance to the Strategy for the Revitalisation of Agriculture, as the Kenyan national agriculture plan is called. Ensuring policy compliance, allows for a coordination of wide ranging interventions under a sector strategy whilst at the same time maintaining flexibility to allow interventions to adapt to local circumstances.

The importance of the political dimension

Successful development in productive sectors often implies not only a change of roles, but also a new distribution of power. Rural development is about grassroots empowerment, about people making money, earning a profit, and becoming more economically independent. Agriculture programmes may imply a tipping of the power balance from the public towards the private sector and within the private sector itself, where there is an equilibrium of interests that is similarly sensitive to being disturbed as is the public-private balance. To some extent, power is a limited resource: In agriculture and rural development (even within single commodity or value-added chains) development often means that for some people to gain, others must loose. Whether it is the public losing out to the private sector, or the middlemen losing out to the small producer: the notion of 'winners and losers' is much more widely accepted in productive than in social sectors. Thus, taking the political economy and power balances into account at policy stage is prerequisite for coming up with policies that are can be implemented at all.

In short, for sectors like agriculture and rural development, an insistence on the classical model of the SWAp, with its focus on national government, single policy and single budgets, is counter-productive. The SWAp's founding principles of ownership, coherence and the use of local systems provide a helpful guide; yet, at the same time, they leave enough flexibility to adapt to local circumstances. What we are looking at is a coherent set of complementary programmes; coordinated by a sector-wide policy; and with implementation by a series of public and private sector actors and organisations. It may be that the 'unruly' features of *eg* agriculture are also present in the 'orderly' sectors; and that we are talking of a difference of degree, rather than of kind. And that the hard won lessons about PBAs in "unruly" sectors may be applicable in the sectors that may be less orderly than they appear to.

10. Some conclusions

We have written this paper to stimulate reflection and debate. We do not wish to draw any heavy-handed conclusions, but instead, in this final section, to offer some thoughts about possible implications and ways forward.

SWAps and PBAs continue to be conceptually relevant approaches to development assistance, fundamentally because they are relevant approaches to development itself. They offer an opportunity to deal with the messy, conflict-ridden, multi-actor and multi-incentive plagued realities of sectors in developing countries and of donors from developed countries. This said the conceptual approach has two risks as well as a promising middle ground.

The first risk is that SWAps become another Planner's Dream, marked by a quest for coherent and consulted policies, actionable plans with clear and unambiguous PAFs, great PFM systems, a objective driven MTEF, evidence streaming out of smart monitoring systems, and donors aligning happily behind the wagon. Obviously, this is a caricature where the perfect is clearly the enemy of the good – but even if half is detracted, there is an enormous risk that SWAps pursue a normative ideal for good sector and aid management which is too far away from the realities in a sector and/or country, and from the realities of donors will and ability to go the Paris-way. We have pointed to this risk in the paper, warning about overestimating what difference a policy can make, how much the state can be extended and how much evidence can be collected and fed back into the policy-results chain; the very chain that from the beginning may be extremely weak in each of its links.

SWAps risk anchoring key actors (from government and development partners) solidly in offices, meetings and conference rooms in the capitals. If they focus too intensively on policies, PFM systems and monitoring systems they may get out of touch with the local realities, and the SWAp may end as an esoteric exercise with little practical relevance. Dealing with complexity by constructing a grand system with fixed norms, standards, checklists and measuring points is not the way forward.

The second risk is an extreme opposite of the first: Taking an approach that assumes that chaos is all-pervasive and continuous and that all that can be done is keeping it basic and simple by way of an unprincipled, unguided muddling through, driven by opportunistic balancing of the various conflicting incentives, pushes and pulls from all corners. This may work in countries that manage their affairs well and make broad systemic progress (rather than experiencing windfall growth). But surrendering to complexity simply because it cannot be organised according to neat prescriptions is not a solution either.

Between these two extremes is the promising middle ground for SWAps, which recognizes the complexity and accepts the mess. This is by far the most demanding and difficult option, but also the one that shows most potential. We have argued that it would entail:

- moving beyond the aid effectiveness agenda in SWAps and adopt a sector development perspective as the basic point of departure, recognising that sectors and SWAps do not start from scratch;

- adopting an explicit political economy perspective on the sector, the stakeholders (including donors) and the wider context in which the sector operates, recognising the fundamental political nature of sector development processes and understanding drivers and constraints to change;
- adding a consistent actor/stakeholder perspective on SWAps and sector programmes, asking not only what is in it, but also who are in it and who does what;
- strengthening managerial inputs in the process – stronger “management from the top” from domestic authorities, better “management from below” from donors.
- focusing on results in a basic, common sense, practical way in all processes and encounters related to SWAps and sector development.

Such a ‘strategic incrementalism’ is a tall order. We notice that when we succeed, in the JLP events, to make participants see this picture of the way forward for the SWAp in a sector, then communication eases, and things that were difficult to discuss become much clearer.

This way of seeing the approach is based on, but also contributes to trust, which is a basic ingredient in making any complex mix of interdependent actors work fruitfully together. Trust in SWAps is built slowly by many factors, and can be destroyed rapidly by as many: It is our belief that a rather modest, realistic and patient approach to SWAps will add to the trust that eventually will lead to reasonable, if not glamorous results.

Annex 1 The Joint Learning Programme on SWAps

The Joint Learning Programme on Sector Programmes (JLP/SWAp) started with 3 pilot events in 2005; carried out 6 events in 2006, and 5 more up to early August 2007. Seven more events were approved for the rest of 2007 and early 2008. So far, around 575 government and donor officials, and civil society representatives, have attended the events, including the pilots.

The events have been positively evaluated by participants, with average scores consistently between “very good” and “good” on a 4-point scale.

The approach to the organisation (the emphasis of active involvement of both donor and government authorities in the preparation, inclusion of local presentations, and the formation of “Next Step”-groups in charge of bringing issues forward to the future process in the sector or country) has proven very successful in anchoring the events in the specific context.

Table 1 shows the events held so far, as well as those planned for the rest of 2007 (timing for future events is indicative only):

Table 1: Events held 2005-2007, and planned for 2007/early 2008:

Country	Sector(s)	Month/year	No. participants	Lead organising donor
Vietnam	Education, Health	2/2005	22	EC
Kenya	Health	11/2005	27	Sida
Kenya	Agriculture	11/2005	42	Sida
Zambia	Water	04/2006	28	Danida
Nicaragua	Health	05/2006	32	DGIS
Laos	Education	06/2006	55	Unicef
Rwanda	Multi-sector	06/2006	40	UNDP
Ethiopia	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	11/2006	20	Italy
Tanzania	Roads	11/2006	30	EC
Burkina Faso	Agriculture	03/2007	47	Danida
Yemen	Education/Water	04/2007	43	DGIS
Guatemala	Education	05/2007	52	CIDA
South Sudan	Education	06/2007	47	EC
Zambia	Environment	07/2007	28	Finnida
Cambodia	Cross-sectoral	07/2007	65	World Bank/UN
Ghana	Decentralisation, Agriculture	3.q/2007		EC/CIDA

Bangladesh	Education, Health	1.q/2008		EC
Bangladesh	Water	4.q/2007		DGIS
Bolivia	Education, Water	1.q/2008		DGIS, EC
Nepal	Education	4.q/2007		Danida
Tanzania	Forestry	4.q/2007		GTZ
Lesotho	Water	4.q/2007		Irish Aid/EC

Country-wise the events will, in early 2008, have taken place in 9 African, 5 Asian, 3 Latin American, and 1 Middle Eastern country. Sector-wise, education will have been covered in 8 events, water in 6, health in 4, and agriculture/forestry in 4. In addition, we will have had 2 multi-sector events, and 1 event in roads, environment and decentralisation, respectively. 6 events have covered more than one sector.

The funding donors behind the JLP/SWAp are most actively engaged as local lead organisers (including funding the local costs of the events). It is notable, however, that several other agencies, including multi-laterals, have taken or will take the lead.

All in all there is a remarkable spread on all accounts reported here, including the size of the events who have included from 20 (Ethiopia) to no less than 65 participants (Cambodia).

To cater for the events in countries where English is not the dominant language, the materials have been successively translated to Vietnamese, Spanish, Lao, French, Arabic and Khmer. It is beyond the competence of the facilitation team to maintain updated versions in all these languages, but at present we count on updated versions in English, French, Spanish, Khmer and Arabic (a final language check is required on the Arabic version).

A more detailed report about the events is available from Train4Dev.

Annex 2 The Sector as an Open System

What is "a sector"?

Consistent with most SWAp and PBA literature, we apply a very pragmatic definition of a sector in the JLP events. A sector…

- is defined by the government
- is wide enough to ensure coherence, narrow enough to limit complexity
- has a fairly coherent & consistent policy
- has an institutional framework
- has a budget framework
- has links to macro framework

However, when participants are asked to "draw" their sector, it always results in different groups of participants applying very different perspectives on what a sector really is: some will see it in terms of actors (organisations), others in terms of functions, others as a set of objectives and mechanisms – and many as a mixture of these and other factors. We are not advocating that an authoritative and exact definition be advocated, but it may be useful to apply at least a double perspective of functional elements (like e.g. policies, PFM, monitoring) and an actor perspective. We will develop this below.

How can "a sector" be assessed or diagnosed?

Both multilateral and bilateral development agencies have for years advocated a SWAp, and many agencies have institutionalised concepts of *eg* 'economic and sector work' (World Bank), 'sector diagnosis' or 'sector road maps' (Asian Development Bank). However, there is apparently little available guidance behind these concepts in terms of how to break down a sector into analytically meaningful segments. The available proposals actually emerge from the narrower context of making SWAps operational. Particularly, the EC's Guidelines for Support to Sector Programmes[17] (EuropeAid, 2003) was explicit in proposing 7 areas of assessment, which have been very influential for subsequent proposals and for the JLP. In table 2 the EC's 'cut' is compared to the later 'cut' in the OECD/DAC Good Practice Paper (DAC, 2006), and the further reduction which is used in the JLP materials.

Though somewhat different, these three versions largely focus on the same basic set of issues in a sector. Some of them can be debated; particularly the focus on a MTEF may be questioned as potentially distractive in sectors and countries which are still struggling to get basics right. Maybe more importantly, these frameworks are fundamentally approaching sector assessment from a technocratic and strongly aid oriented perspective: A policy can be (mis)understood as a policy document; PFM and MTEFs can be (ineffectively) addressed as apolitical technical instruments; capacity issues can be (erroneously) reduced to questions of

[17] A revised version of EC's Guidelines for Sector Support is being finalized as this paper is written

training and technical assistance; monitoring systems can (expensively and ineffectively) become ends in themselves; and attention to donor coordination can (dangerously) substitute for the attention to sector coordination processes. Naturally, these things do not need to happen, but it is clear that the assessment areas as such have been born out of a rather technocratic and aid delivery-oriented perspective.

Table 2 – Sector Assessment Areas

EC 2003	OECD/DAC 2006	JLP Events Materials
The macroeconomic framework		The sector policy in the macro-context
The sector policy	A clear nationally-owned sector policy and strategy	
The sector medium-term expenditure framework	A medium-term expenditure programme that reflects the sector strategy	The budget and PFM system
Accountability and Public financial management (PFM) systems	Systematic arrangements for programming the resources that support the sector	
Institutional and capacity issues		Institutional & orga-nizational capacity; Decentralisation
Performance monitoring and client consultations systems	A performance monitoring system that measures progress and strengthens accountability Broad consultation mechanisms that involve all significant stakeholders	Accountability and performance monitoring
Status of donor coordination	A formalised government-led process for aid co-ordination and dialogue at the sector level; An agreed process for moving towards harmonised systems for reporting, budgeting, financial management and procurement	Harmonization and alignment

We realise that there is no alternative 'clean cut', whereby all relevant issues are perfectly covered without overlaps or residuals; such a cut – if it could be made, which is doubtful – would not necessarily be useful either: overlaps may serve to invite different angles to be explored. Nevertheless, we propose adding at least four issues to the current set:

1. Actual sector performance; results or outputs (services, regulatory activities) as well as outcomes and impact (on social and productive conditions and behaviour)

2. The wider political economy; the wider context for sector performance in terms of country-wide institutional and political factors; public sector incentives; relevant stakeholder incentives or disincentives for performance and change

3. Governance and accountability at sector level; including sector coordination and "networking" issues, between and among state and of non-state stakeholders

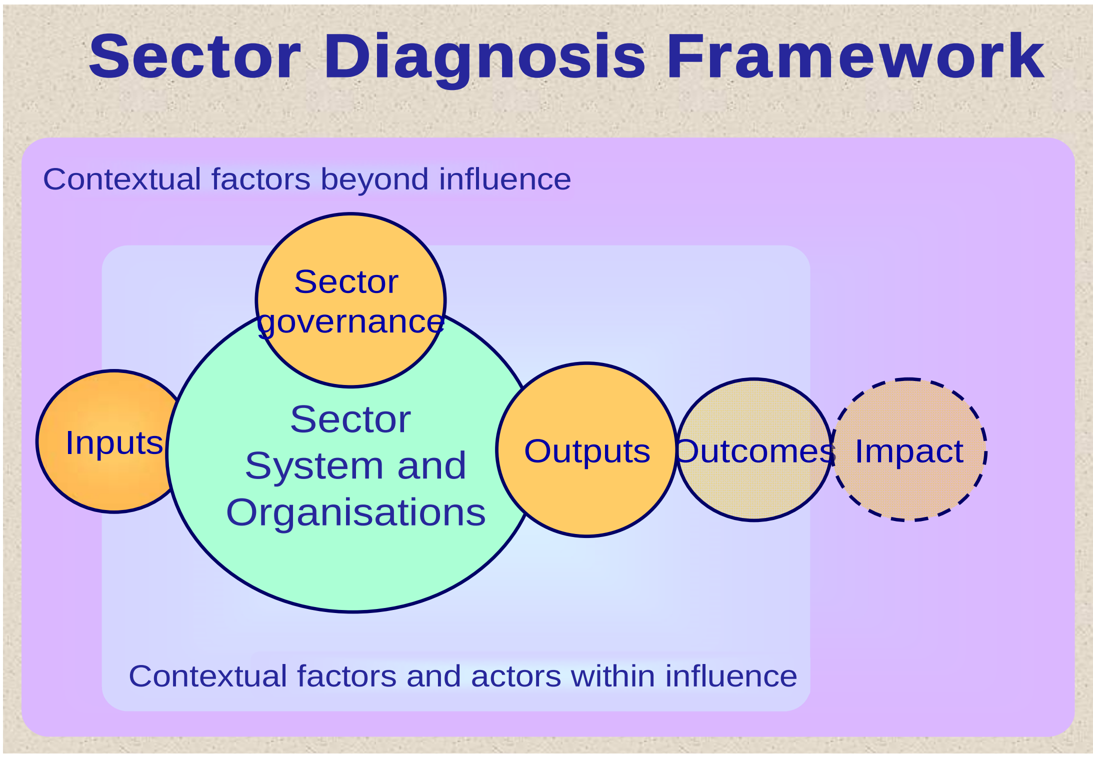
4. Decentralisation and deconcentration; at country level: the balance of power between central and decentralized levels; extent of local autonomy (administrative, fiscal); at

sector level: the flow of policy and resources to sub-national levels, as well as negotiation processes around policy and budget making.

Some of these issues may be addressed under the headings already in use by the EC, OECD or the JLP. Nevertheless, it is our experiences that, when not explicitly mentioned, these issues do risk being overlooked, despite being key determinants of potential sector performance.

A proposal for a conceptual framework for sector assessment

We think that it would help practitioners to think about sectors and sector diagnostics in a more systematic way and propose to look at a sector as an open system of rules, norms, organizations, actors, processes and resources seen by significant actors to have a common focus, embedded in a wider context and producing a set of outputs (public and private goods, services, regulations) which contributes to outcomes and wider impact. This tentative formulation[18] would leave it to relevant stakeholders to say where a sector starts and stops in terms of substance; but it would – whenever that common focus is defined – propose to not consider that sector an entity in isolation, but instead to adopt an open system's perspective with respect to the sector concerned.



[18] We recognize that this is a definition of sorts, but we would at least at this point in time not suggest that it be adopted as more than one (useful!) way of looking at a sector, among other alternatives.

The advantage of this overall approach would be fourfold:

1. It allows for a strong focus on performance: Sector outputs, their relevance (for outcomes or for the "demand side") and their ultimate contribution to societal impact;

2. It underlines that sectors are not autonomous or independent, but instead embedded in the wider social, political and institutional context;

3. It is systemic and would thus in principle invite to a holistic approach to diagnosis. This should help avoid superficial single-issue approaches (which may tend to identify the problem as the lack of an already identified remedy).

4. By focusing on the domestic/national sector system, where it is and where it can develop, this model departs from a development assistance perspective and instead focuses on sustainable sector performance. Within this, development assistance continues to play a role but only to the extent that it contributes to the wider sector perspective.

An additional advantage of this model is that it is congruent with mainstream approaches to organizational diagnosis (Europe Aid, 2005; Harrison & Shirom, 1999). Here, the sector is to some degree seen as an organization (or 'organism'), inviting diagnosis of the existing sector capacity (inside the big circle of the figure).

The smaller circles and the wider context analysis in the above figure would not need extensive justifications, except maybe the sector governance circle. This element is proposed as a separate element because it allows for (i) a focus on the larger governance and accountability mechanisms in the sector and between the sector and the wider society; and (ii) a systematic analysis of the relations (voice, transparency, mechanism for imposing authority) and information sharing (availability, timeliness, access, comprehensiveness) between the relevant stakeholders. These include the political level, the central public administration, public and private front line service providers, oversight or checks-and-balances institutions, citizens/consumers, lobby groups and special interest groups. Without a clear focus, this analysis may otherwise be fragmented or lost.

The issues to be looked at would thus include:

- Context factors (macro-economics, macro-policies, structural, institutional, political economy, public sector wide issues)

- Sector resources and inputs (including public and non-public)

- Sector outputs, their relevance for outcomes and impact

- Sector governance and accountability

Inside the "Sector Systems and Organizations" circle, a number of sub-issues could be singled out. To keep matters simple, as well as inspired by experience and common sense, issues to be addressed are based on the existing sector diagnosis frameworks currently in use (by the EC, OECD and JLP). However, though the issues are similar, under the current model these should not be assessed from 'closed' sector-internal viewpoint only, but also in relation to contextual political and economy-wide issues. The following assessment areas are proposed:

- Policy frameworks; sector vision and strategy; legal issues and legislative frameworks;
- Public financial management systems and capacity;
- Organizational capacities in the sector;
- Feedback-mechanisms (monitoring and use of monitoring results);
- Sector coordination mechanisms; this would include domestic network capabilities in the sector and to external domestic actors; as well as harmonization and alignment issues and coordination with and amongst development partners.
- Decentralisation and/or deconcentration; this could be seen as a subset of organizational capacities or sector coordination mechanisms as indicated above. However, as it is often overlooked in SWAps we propose to keep it Sa separate issue;
- Specific incentives driving or constraining performance; these are derived from a political economy analysis, an assessment of wider context factors (structural and institutional) and sector factors. This issue is added as a separate theme, mainly to ensure that sector diagnosis detects the actual drivers of behaviour and performance.

The above model supports the move from a more narrow aid effectiveness perspective on SWAps to a broader, sector development focus by giving more attention to political economy and stakeholder aspects of SWAps. At the sector level, the proposed model still looks at similar key areas as are currently addressed in the existing sector diagnosis frameworks currently in use (by the EC, OECD and JLP). However, we propose that these should not be assessed from a 'closed' sector-internal viewpoint, but in relation to contextual political and economy-wide issues. In doing so, the model aims to support the move from a more narrow aid effectiveness perspective on SWAps to a broader, sector development focus by concentrating less on the conditions (or 'maturity of the sector') for sector programmes but instead giving more attention to the political economy and stakeholder aspects of SWAPs. In this sense, the model is consistent with the transition from a rather narrow aid effectiveness focus to a broader sector development perspective, which the JLP have embodied.

Towards and actor perspective

There is yet one missing element: What we have outlined so far is largely adding to an analysis of the current reality in the sector, and of the current vision for where the sector will be moving. In the crucial action perspective which is the whole reason for spending energy on the analysis, it would also be necessary to look at the change capacity of domestic actors, and the options for development partners to strengthen that change capacity. To do this properly would require a further shift towards an actor-perspective to the extent that it becomes one of the entry points to sector analysis. We attempted to do this by adding an actor dimension to the areas for sector diagnosis proposed above, thus creating a matrix along a 'function' and 'actor' axis. By linking the 'function' and 'actor' it is hoped that, the individual assessment areas will yield more relevant information regarding drivers and 'brakes' for change as well as incentives and disincentives for performance.

Actor perspective / Functional perspective	Central state, local government and non-state actors	Incentives, interests and preferences	Power, voice and mechanisms of influence	Capacity for change & change management	Strategic and operational implications for the SWAp
Context factors: structural, institutional; political economy factors; macro-economic and macro-policy framework					
Present and feasible future sector outputs and outcomes: service delivery, regulatory activities…					
Sector policy and legal framework: content and process, relevance, effectiveness, attention to cross cutting issues (gender, environment…)					
Sector resources: present and likely future resource envelope					
Sector governance: formal and informal rules of the game and their enforcement, checks and balances, accountability, transparency….					
Public financial management systems and capacity					
Organizational capacities of public and private actors in the sector					
Feedback-mechanisms and evidence: monitoring, evidence and use of the results					
Sector coordination mechanisms: domestic network capabilities in the sector and with external domestic actors, and with development partners					
Decentralisation/deconcentration: balance between central control/ local autonomy					

Filling out the table requires a further breakdown by actors under each row, but it is merely presented here as a first step towards a potential conceptual tool.

We recognize that extending the number of issues to be considered, and requesting that an actor or stakeholder perspective be applied, does not make life simpler. On the other hand, we would challenge the proposition that a much more simplified analytical framework would enable stakeholders to reach broad agreements on politically and technically feasible ways forward in sectors and countries where performance has been weak. If performance is already stronger, and on an improving path, then the details of that fortunate situation would in itself provide the answer to many of assessment questions implicit in the model above.

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