



**WATER
RESILIENCE
TRACKER**

TECHNICAL REPORT

Benchmarking the Malawi water sector Joint Sector Review system

**A Diagnostic Assessment and
Reform Pathways for SPR–JSR
Governance**

Benchmarking the Malawi water sector Joint Sector Review system

A Diagnostic Assessment and Reform Pathways for SPR–JSR Governance

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Glossary of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this report.

AMCOW	African Ministers' Council on Water
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency – New Partnership for Africa's Development
COP27	Twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DP	Development Partner
DRM	Domestic Resource Mobilisation
EO&M	Operations and Maintenance Expenditure
GLAAS	Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
JMP	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme
JSR	Joint Sector Review
KII	Key Informant Interview (qualitative component of the IWMI JSR Assessment Survey)
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MAC	Mutual Accountability Compact
MIP-1	Malawi 2063 First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2021–2030)
MIS	Management Information System
MoAIWD	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (former name, see MoWS)
MoFEA	Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
MoWS	Ministry of Water and Sanitation (formerly MoAIWD, reorganised during the period under review)
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
MW2063	Malawi 2063. national long-term development vision
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSO	National Statistical Office
NWRA	National Water Resources Authority
O&M	Operations and Maintenance

ODF	Open Defecation Free
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PECG	Pillar-Enabler Coordination Group
PSIP	Public Sector Investment Programme
RACI	Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (governance assignment matrix)
RBM	Results-Based Management
ReSAKSS	Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System
SDG 6	Sustainable Development Goal 6. Clean Water and Sanitation
SPR	Sector Performance Report
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
SWG	Sector Working Group
TOC	Table of Contents (also. Theory of Change, depending on context)
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WES-Net	Water and Environmental Sanitation Network Malawi
WHO	World Health Organization
WSAU	Water Sector Accountability Unit

Executive Summary and Key Messages

WHY THIS ASSESSMENT MATTERS

Effective governance, rather than infrastructure investment alone, ultimately determines whether water sector investments translate into sustainable services and improved development outcomes. Across many low-income countries, Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs) have become the principal mechanism for promoting mutual accountability, coordinating stakeholders, assessing sector performance, and informing policy and investment decisions. Despite their widespread adoption, however, relatively little empirical evidence exists on whether JSRs actually function as effective governance systems capable of translating commitments into sustained action and improved sector performance.

This report addresses that evidence gap through the first comprehensive institutional diagnostic of Malawi's Water JSR and Sector Performance Report (SPR) system. Rather than assessing the quality of the annual review meeting alone, the study examines whether the broader governance architecture surrounding the JSR is capable of generating accountability, learning, and continuous sector improvement.

In the context of Malawi's water sector, it is the primary institutional mechanism through which planning commitments are converted into accountable action and through which evidence of sector performance is translated into resource allocation, policy adjustment, and course correction.

Malawi faces accelerating water-related climate risks: increasing rainfall variability, prolonged dry spells, and intensifying flood events that place growing pressure on already-stretched water infrastructure and service delivery systems. In this context, the quality of water sector governance is not merely a technocratic concern, it is a determinant of resilience. A Joint Sector Review that functions effectively generates the evidence needed to plan adaptively, allocates resources to where need is greatest, and holds the system accountable to outcomes rather than outputs.

This is why the JSR reform agenda matters beyond the boundaries of the WASH sector. Strengthening the institutional architecture of the JSR is, in effect, strengthening Malawi's capacity to plan, finance, and deliver water-resilient development in the face of climate change.

The assessment employed a convergent mixed-methods design integrating four complementary sources of evidence: (i) 126 semi-structured interviews across eight categories of sector stakeholders; (ii) a systematic review of three consecutive JSR cycles (2023–2025) together with associated policy, planning and performance documents; (iii) structured quantitative assessment of key governance dimensions; and (iv) a multi-stakeholder validation workshop that tested and refined the emerging findings. The triangulation of these independent evidence streams provides one of the most robust evidence bases assembled to date for evaluating WASH sector accountability systems in an aid-dependent context.

This assessment was produced under the Just Transition for Water Security (JTWS) programme, within the Water Resilience Tracker (WRT) workstream. It operationalises activities named directly in the Malawi WRT Theory of Change – technical assistance to JSR technical working groups, consultation and engagement with the JSR multi-stakeholder platform, and quality assurance of the draft JSR report – which are expected to strengthen JSR-related multi-stakeholder platforms and deliver more inclusive, funded, evidence-based multi-sector reporting and planning for climate-resilient water security. In this sense, the diagnostic presented here is not a stand-alone governance study: it is the evidence base for one of WRT's core outcome pathways toward strengthened, more inclusive climate-resilient water security policies, strategies and plans in Malawi.

CENTRAL FINDING

Malawi's Joint Sector Review underperforms not because review procedures are weak, but because the institutional systems required to sustain accountability between review cycles have not been established.

The JSR is formally recognised as the country's principal mutual accountability mechanism for the WASH sector. However, it remains structurally incapable of consistently translating review findings into corrective action, improved coordination, and sustained sector performance. The central governance challenge is therefore institutional rather than procedural.

Drawing on principal–agent theory, results-based management, sector-wide governance literature, and the concepts of capability traps and isomorphic mimicry, this assessment demonstrates that Malawi's JSR currently functions primarily as an annual review event rather than as a continuous governance system.

THREE STRUCTURAL SYSTEM FAILURES

1. The JSR functions as an annual event rather than a continuous governance system. Although review meetings generate commitments and agreed undertakings, these are not supported by a permanent governance structure capable of coordinating implementation throughout the year.
2. Fragmented data systems weaken evidence-based accountability. Multiple reporting platforms, inconsistent indicator definitions, limited interoperability, and uneven district reporting capacity constrain the production of reliable evidence for planning, budgeting, and performance management.
3. The accountability framework excludes the majority of sector financing. Development partners finance approximately 85 percent of WASH sector investment, yet no formal mechanism exists within the JSR framework to reconcile financing commitments, monitor actual disbursements, or assess alignment between investments and agreed sector priorities.

THE GOVERNANCE GAP

Documentary evidence, stakeholder assessments, survey results, and validation workshop findings consistently demonstrate that Malawi possesses many of the institutional structures associated with effective Joint Sector Reviews. However, these structures have not yet evolved into an integrated governance system capable of sustaining accountability throughout the year. This gap weakens implementation, limits evidence-based planning and budgeting, and reduces the contribution of the JSR to improved sector performance.

THREE STRATEGIC REFORM PRIORITIES

Institutional coordination

Establish a legally mandated, adequately resourced, year-round JSR Secretariat responsible for coordination, undertakings tracking, monitoring, reporting, and accountability enforcement.

Integrated data infrastructure

Develop a harmonised Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework supported by an interoperable national WASH Management Information System (MIS) and standardised sector indicators.

Financing accountability

Introduce formal reporting of development partner commitments, annual reconciliation of pledged versus actual disbursements, and lifecycle financing analysis within the JSR governance framework.

Together, these reforms would shift the JSR from an event-based review model to a system-based governance model.

WHY THIS MATTERS BEYOND MALAWI

The study demonstrates that the effectiveness of Joint Sector Reviews depends less on the quality of annual review meetings than on the institutional architecture that supports implementation between review cycles. By operationalising international accountability principles into a structured diagnostic framework, the report provides a transferable benchmark for strengthening Joint Sector Review systems across Sub-Saharan Africa and other aid-dependent settings.

WHY THIS IS AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT

The present moment offers an exceptional window for JSR reform in Malawi. Malawi's NDCs are in active revision, and its National Adaptation Plan is deepening creating a direct opportunity to embed water resilience indicators within the JSR framework and link sector performance monitoring to national climate commitments and international climate finance access. The JTWS programme (2024–2029), funded by FCDO and implemented by IWMI with AGWA, Arup, and Deltares, is already engaged in Malawi through the Water Resilience Tracker, providing the technical and policy infrastructure to support this work. Malawi Vision 2063 and MIP-1 place water security at the centre of long-term national ambitions, making JSR reform directly relevant to the government's own development priorities. At the same time, growing global interest in financing climate-resilient water systems means Malawi is well-positioned to access adaptation finance windows provided it can demonstrate the governance credentials that creditors require. The 2025 JSR cycle and the broad stakeholder engagement in this assessment have generated genuine momentum: the conditions for reform are in place, and this is the moment to act on them.

KEY POLICY MESSAGE

The effectiveness of a Joint Sector Review is determined not simply by how well the annual review meeting is conducted, but by whether the institutional systems exist to implement, monitor, and enforce the decisions taken.

Strong review processes generate commitments; strong governance systems ensure those commitments are delivered. Sustainable improvements therefore depend on strengthening the accountability architecture that operates throughout the year.

KEY THEMES

Joint Sector Review (JSR); WASH governance; mutual accountability; sector performance; governance systems; institutional reform; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL); Management Information Systems (MIS); financing accountability; Malawi; aid-dependent contexts.

Introduction, Background and Context

1.1 Background

The Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Joint Sector Review (JSR) in Malawi is formally established as the principal mechanism for promoting reciprocal accountability within the national development architecture. Aligned with Malawi 2063 (MW2063) and its First 10-Year Implementation Plan (MIP-1), the JSR is intended to serve as the central platform for tracking sector performance. It maps progress against national priorities and global commitments – including Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), the African Union Agenda 2063, and the Africa Water Vision 2025 (African Union Commission, 2015, National Planning Commission, 2021, United Nations, 2015). Embedded within the Human Capital Development Pillar–Enabler Coordination Group, the JSR reflects the positioning of WASH as a critical enabler of inclusive economic transformation and productivity growth (National Planning Commission, 2021, World Bank, 2017).

Institutional responsibility for water policy, sector coordination, and performance reporting lies with the Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MoWS), which was established following the restructuring of government ministries and previously fell under the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD). The Ministry is responsible for providing policy direction, coordinating sector stakeholders, and overseeing water sector performance monitoring and reporting (Government of Malawi, 2024; Ministry of Water and Sanitation, 2024).

This institutional transition reflects broader governance reforms aimed at strengthening coordination, accountability, and sector performance management (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005, Danert et al., 2016). In this context, the JSR is positioned as the primary national instrument for reporting progress on SDG 6, Agenda 2063, the Africa Water Vision 2025, and climate-related commitments under COP27 (African Union Commission, 2015, UN-Water, 2022, Water Sector Accountability Unit [WSAU], 2025).

Despite this strong normative and institutional architecture, empirical evidence from sector governance literature indicates persistent weaknesses in the operationalisation of Joint Sector Reviews. Rather than functioning as continuous adaptive governance mechanisms, JSRs frequently operate as periodic reporting events, limiting their influence on planning, budgeting, and service delivery processes (Danert et al., 2016, OECD, 2005). This results in weak implementation follow-through, with undertaking completion rates in many

contexts remaining at approximately 40–60 percent, reflecting limited enforcement capacity and weak accountability loops (UN-Water, 2022).

These challenges are compounded by tightening fiscal space and declining aid flows. Both factors constrain sector financing and reduce implementation capacity. The divergence between the JSR's intended role as a mutual accountability and performance management mechanism and its observed operational performance highlights a critical governance gap. Without strengthened analytical preparation, institutionalised follow-up systems, and inclusive stakeholder engagement, the JSR risks functioning primarily as a symbolic compliance mechanism rather than a results-oriented governance tool (OECD, 2005, Danert et al., 2016).

IMPLICATION

The governance deficit identified here is not aspirational. It is structural. The JSR was designed to be a two-way accountability mechanism, it currently functions as an annual reporting forum. Malawi's JSR underperformance is not a process failure but a system weakness driven by the absence of continuous accountability infrastructure. Bridging this gap requires institutional redesign, not incremental process improvement. And that is what the reforms proposed in this report are designed to deliver.

This assessment was conducted for the Water Resilience Tracker Project under the Just Transitions for Water Security programme. It is designed to provide government and sector stakeholders with the evidence needed to prioritise reforms and allocate resources more effectively, with the goal of contributing to more resilient and better-performing water systems in Malawi.

1.2 Why the JSR Matters. Conceptual Foundations

The JSR is a central governance mechanism in the water, sanitation, and irrigation sectors, designed to promote coordination, performance assessment, and mutual accountability among government, development partners, civil society, and the private sector. Grounded in principles of results-based management and country ownership, the JSR facilitates collective evaluation of sector progress against agreed targets (World Bank, 2017, UNICEF, 2019). A core function of the JSR – through the Sector Performance Report – is to establish a single version of the truth by harmonising fragmented data across sub-sectors. This enables evidence-based planning and decision.

The JSR also provides a formal platform for joint accountability. In aid-dependent contexts, transparent reporting on commitments, actions, and results is essential for effective sector governance. By establishing time-bound undertakings and mechanisms for tracking implementation, JSR processes can help address the

implementation gaps associated with institutional reforms that adopt formal structures without achieving substantive improvements in performance—a phenomenon described as isomorphic mimicry (Andrews et al., 2017).

Additionally, when aligned with national budgeting cycles, the JSR can inform performance-based resource allocation. It further links national performance to global frameworks such as SDG 6 through reporting mechanisms coordinated by the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW, 2021).

1.3 Characteristics of a Robust JSR

Robust JSR systems share several defining features: strong government leadership, institutionalised coordination mechanisms, integrated and harmonised evidence systems, and structured follow-up processes that track agreed priority actions and commitments. They are most effective when embedded within national planning, monitoring, and budgeting cycles – and when they facilitate mutual accountability across government and development partners (Danert et al., 2016, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005, UN-Water, 2022). Coordination of this kind does not necessarily require a new institution, it can be delivered either by empowering an actor already embedded in national planning, monitoring, and budgeting cycles.

1.4 The Problem Statement

The Malawi WASH Sector Performance Review (SPR) and JSR framework is intended to function as a central mechanism for mutual accountability, sector coordination, and evidence-based decision-making. It is anchored in national priorities such as Malawi 2063 and continental and global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the perception is that while the SPR–JSR governance system is institutionally established, its effectiveness as a decision-support and accountability mechanism remains uncertain.

Persistent challenges within the WASH sector undermine the system's ability to generate reliable evidence, track sector performance, and enforce accountability across stakeholders. In addition, unclear roles and responsibilities, coupled with constrained financing for decentralised participation, weaken inclusiveness and limit the integration of district-level realities into national decision-making processes.

These systemic constraints raise critical concerns regarding whether the SPR–JSR governance process is functioning as intended. Namely, as a platform that not only reviews sector performance but also drives corrective action, informs policy and resource allocation, and ensures shared accountability among government, development partners, civil society, and the private sector.

Against this backdrop, there is a need to assess whether the Malawi WASH SPR–JSR system functions as an effective accountability and decision-support mechanism. Where gaps exist, the assessment identifies feasible and evidence-based reforms to strengthen performance, alignment, and impact.

1.5 Objectives of the Assessment

A robust JSR in the water sector is a structured, inclusive, and evidence-based accountability mechanism through which government and sector stakeholders jointly assess performance, review progress against agreed commitments, identify bottlenecks, and define corrective actions.

Effective JSRs require government leadership, credible sector reporting, stakeholder participation, transparent review processes, and mechanisms for tracking agreed undertakings (Danert et al., 2016; Sanitation and Water for All [SWA], 2022)

This integrated assessment aims to:

- Benchmark Malawi’s current Water JSR approach, processes, and institutional arrangements against recognised JSR robustness criteria (WSAU, 2025).
- Diagnose where and why the Malawi Water JSR cycle underperforms, including weaknesses in analytical preparation, evidence quality, process sequencing, stakeholder participation, accountability mechanisms, and follow-up practices.
- Present cross-year empirical evidence from the 2023–2025 JSR cycle on sector performance trajectories and structural constraints (MoWS, 2023, 2024, 2025, WSAU, 2025).
- Provide practical, sequenced, and evidence-based reform guidance aligned with the 2025 JSR undertakings tracking matrix and the MoWS Strategic Plan (Government of Malawi, 2025d).
- Clarify the implications of a strengthened JSR governance system for irrigation monitoring and evaluation.

CORE ASSESSMENT QUESTION

Does the Malawi WASH SPR–JSR governance system function as an effective mutual accountability and decision-support mechanism, aligned with national and continental water sector commitments. And if not, what feasible reforms can strengthen it?

This study contributes to the literature on sector governance and two-way accountability by advancing a system-based interpretation of JSRs. Specifically, it reframes JSR effectiveness not in terms of procedural compliance, but in terms of the institutional conditions required to translate commitments into enforceable action. In doing so, it extends existing theoretical frameworks, including principal–agent theory and capability trap theory, into the operationally underexplored domain of WASH sector governance in low-income, aid-dependent contexts (Andrews. M., 2013; Andrews. M., 2017; Pritchett et al., 2013)

1.6 Structure of the Report

This report is organised into seven chapters, supported by a glossary, a list of tables, and seven technical annexes. Chapter 2 maps the continental, regional, and national commitment architecture anchoring the JSR and outlines what the JSR is normatively expected to deliver. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and empirical literature review grounding the assessment. Chapter 4 presents the full assessment methodology, including the theoretical framework, diagnostic tool, and data collection instruments. Chapter 5 presents the assessment findings and discussion across nine thematic domains, beginning with a cross-institutional synthesis of primary findings (Section 5.1).

Chapter 6 proposes reform pathways and presents twelve sequenced, evidence-based recommendations. Chapter 7 presents the conclusion, including implications for sector performance, the reform imperative, and the study’s contribution to knowledge. Annexes provide supporting technical instruments including. The SPR Quality Rubric (Annex A), Undertakings Tracker Template (Annex B), Proposed JSR Annual Calendar (Annex C), Governance RACI Map (Annex D), AU Water Accountability Alignment Scorecard (Annex E), IWMI JSR Assessment Survey Instrument (Annex F), and disaggregated survey results by institutional category (Annex G).

The unifying argument running through all seven chapters is that Malawi’s JSR underperformance is not a process failure but an institutional governance failure, driven by the absence of sustained systems for coordination, evidence management, and accountability follow-through Understanding this distinction is essential to understanding why the reforms proposed in Chapters 6 and 7 target institutional design rather than procedural compliance.

Continental, Regional and National Commitments Anchoring the Water JSR

2.1 Overview of the Commitment Architecture

Malawi's JSR governance system sits within a layered architecture of continental, regional, and national commitments that formally require it to function as a structured accountability mechanism. This architecture is not aspirational. It generates binding obligations for tracking commitments, financing, and service outcomes.

International and continental guidance on WASH sector coordination identifies core requirements for effective JSRs, including national ownership, evidence-based SPRs, inclusive participation, documented commitments, follow-up mechanisms, and links between review processes and national planning frameworks (Danert et al., 2016; AMCOW, 2018; UN-Water, 2022).

The African Union's emerging continental water governance framework provides the foundation for this diagnostic. Drawing on the accountability and implementation priorities articulated in the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy, this assessment applies five analytical accountability principles: measurable commitment anchoring, financial commitment tracking, investment–performance linkage, climate resilience integration, and structured mutual accountability (African Ministers' Council on Water & African Union Commission [AMCOW & AUC], 2026).

A well-functioning JSR is expected to operationalise these commitments through measurable indicators, aligned financing, and enforceable accountability structures. Malawi's current performance against these five principles is assessed in Annex E.

2.2 Alignment with SDG 6, Malawi 2063, and National Policy Frameworks

At the continental level, Agenda 2063 sets out Africa's vision for long-term transformation focused on water security, climate resilience, infrastructure, and accountable governance (African Union Commission, 2015). Separately, AMCOW accountability systems require Member States to institutionalise formal review mechanisms to monitor commitments, financing adequacy, and service outcomes (AMCOW, 2018).

Globally, SDG 6 establishes the framework for international accountability reporting. Malawi's Voluntary National Review obligations require systematic reporting against SDG 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6, and 6.b (United Nations, 2015, UN-Water, 2022). Nationally, Malawi 2063 positions water security as a core enabler of human capital development, agricultural transformation, and resilience (Government of Malawi, 2020). MIP-1 operationalises this by prioritising universal potable water access, open defecation free (ODF) elimination, and institutional governance reform (National Planning Commission, 2021). The National Water Policy 2023 operationalises these commitments through six strategic pillars, with the JSR positioned as the central accountability mechanism (Government of Malawi, 2023).

The common thread is that the JSR is formally designated as the mechanism through which compliance with national, continental, and global commitments should be demonstrated. SPRs do not systematically cross-reference any of these three framework levels. a coordination gap confirmed across all three evidence streams.

2.3 Climate-Resilient WASH Financing Strategy

Climate vulnerability represents a structural risk for infrastructure sustainability, with repeated droughts, floods, and cyclones exposing system fragility across Malawi (Government of Malawi, 2021, IPCC, 2022). Hutton, G., & Varughese, M. (2016) estimates that climate change-induced water scarcity could reduce GDP in the most water-stressed regions by as much as 6% by 2050 through its impacts on agriculture, health, and household incomes. Given the central role of water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in protecting public health and sustaining human capital, disruptions to WASH services constitute an important pathway through which these economic impacts are transmitted.

The Malawi Climate-Resilient WASH Financing Strategy 2022–2032 provides the normative framework for integrating climate resilience into WASH sector planning, investment prioritisation, and financing approaches (Government of Malawi & UNICEF Malawi, 2022). However, translating this framework into routine sector accountability mechanisms, including JSR indicators, sector performance reporting, and monitoring systems, remains an emerging institutional challenge (Ministry of Water and Sanitation, 2025). Climate variability, drought risks, and increasing pressure on water resources continue to threaten the reliability and sustainability of rural water services, demonstrating that climate integration is not only a future planning concern but an immediate governance priority (WaterAid Malawi, 2025).

The Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) sequences national capital investment, making JSR–PSIP alignment essential for translating review findings into funded projects. A structurally aligned cycle would include. SPR

analysis performed by July, TWG validation by August, JSR held before budget finalisation, and undertakings fed directly into PSIP proposals (WSAU, 2025, Danert et al., 2016).

Currently, the JSR is held in May, approximately three months after the national budget consultation window closes in February and six months after MTEF preparation begins in October–November of the preceding year. This structural misalignment means JSR findings cannot directly influence the current MTEF cycle.

2.5 Comparative JSR Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

The national JSR experience is not an isolated experience. A comparative analysis of JSR progressions in Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana and Kenya sheds light on the governance gains achievable through institutional consolidation while highlighting the structural impediments that limit advancement for aid-reliant low-income countries. These yardsticks serve as an adjunct empirical base for the diagnostic results and reform proposals.

Uganda's WASH sector review process provides the most directly comparable governance trajectory. Uganda's Water and Environment Sector JSR provides a formal platform for performance assessment, priority-setting, and monitoring of agreed sector undertakings through sector working group mechanisms. Evidence from Uganda's broader public financial management reforms shows that instruments such as the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) were introduced to strengthen budget planning, predictability, and alignment between policy priorities and expenditure decisions (Brownbridge et al., 2009). However, Uganda's broader reform experience also demonstrates that formal institutional arrangements alone are insufficient unless accompanied by implementation capability, coordination, and institutional ownership (Andrews et al., 2017).

This supports the sequencing argument that strengthening the institutional architecture for review processes should precede attempts to improve analytical sophistication and enforcement of sector commitments. Uganda has strengthened its Joint Sector Review processes through institutionalised sector monitoring and reporting mechanisms that bring together government, local government, and development partner information to support sector planning, performance assessment, and accountability. Such approaches reflect broader good practice in JSR design, where harmonised information systems and shared evidence platforms strengthen coordination and evidence-based decision-making (WaterAid, 2016). This reform enhanced financial transparency and sector-level monitoring, which sought to deal head-on with the risk of governance fragmentation that continues to plague Malawi's financing systems. Uganda's

experience shows promise in the formalisation of secretariat functions, however, differences across contexts can prevent direct replication in Malawi.

The SWAp context, particularly in Tanzania, as recorded in Holvoet and Inberg (2009), can help to interpret principal-agent framing as appropriate in this work. For this reason, the water sector SWAp of Tanzania is an example of how system level approaches can result in particularly intense accountability tensions in settings where development partners' funding is prevalent and joint accountability mechanisms underdeveloped. Development Partner Performance Assessment Framework, which is aligned with the forecasted disbursement schedule of various partners based on the quality of technical assistance, was implemented in this case to mitigate this imbalance in the sector review cycle.

The Tanzanian case also offers cautionary findings. Wild and Foresti (2013) discovered that JSR governance process quality in Tanzania declined during periods of fiscal uncertainty, indicating that JSR resilience is susceptible to macroeconomic shocks unless institutional arrangements are adequately unified to preserve process discipline in the absence of supportive financing.

KEY LESSON FOR MALAWI

Formalised institutional arrangements. A legal mandate with a clearly designated coordinating authority, and a signed Mutual Accountability Compact are the shock absorbers that allow the JSR to maintain governance discipline even during fiscal contractions. Without them, Malawi's JSR will remain vulnerable to the same cyclical deterioration observed in Tanzania.

Ghana provides one of the closest comparative examples to Malawi's WASH JSR model. Ghana's WASH sector has developed relatively mature sector coordination arrangements, including periodic sector reviews, agreed monitoring frameworks, and structured engagement between government, development partners, and civil society. However, evidence from Ghana also highlights the continuing challenge of translating review findings into enforceable actions, stronger accountability mechanisms, and corresponding financing adjustments (AMCOW, 2018; World Bank, 2017).

Ghana's experience demonstrates the importance of harmonised indicators and common monitoring frameworks in improving the quality, comparability, and usefulness of sector performance analysis. Standardised WASH monitoring approaches have strengthened consistency in reporting, although challenges remain in translating performance evidence into improved resource allocation, institutional accountability, and implementation effectiveness (World Health Organization, World Bank, & UNICEF, 2022; World Bank, 2017).

Ghana's experience demonstrates that harmonised monitoring frameworks and agreed sector indicators can improve the consistency and usefulness of WASH

sector performance analysis, although stronger institutional mechanisms are still required to translate review findings into financing decisions and implementation commitments (AMCOW, 2018; WHO/UNICEF, 2023).

Ghana's experience also highlights the risks associated with reform sequencing. While strengthened financing frameworks and performance monitoring systems are important components of sector governance, institutional innovations may have limited effect when introduced before accountability mechanisms, implementation routines, and ownership structures are sufficiently established. This reflects the broader capability trap problem identified by Andrews. M. (2017), whereby reforms may create sophisticated formal arrangements without corresponding implementation capacity. Ghana's WASH governance framework recognises the Joint Sector Review as a mechanism for assessing sector performance, reviewing financing, and agreeing priority actions; however, challenges in sustaining coordination processes demonstrate the importance of operational capacity alongside formal structures. Kenya's experience with decentralisation adds another dimension, showing that fiscal decentralisation can influence sub-national service delivery performance, but outcomes depend on institutional capacity, accountability arrangements, and coordination between national and county governments.

KEY LESSON FOR MALAWI

Embedding harmonised WASH indicators within a sector-wide Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework, codified in a national handbook is a low-resistance, high-leverage intervention Malawi can implement in Phase I. Reform sequencing must ensure undertakings tracking is operational before more complex financing frameworks. Ghana's experience demonstrates the cost of technical tools arriving before enforcement infrastructure is ready.

In Kenya, the decentralisation of responsibilities for delivering WASH services to county government officials in 2013, by conditional performance-related transfers, enhanced the extent of subnational participation quality and county level data reporting in the sector review cycle significantly (Wil, L & Foresti, 2013). Kenya's example directly aligns with the Phase III reform priority to grow conditional decentralised transfers in Malawi. While also confirming that fiduciary capacity building should go hand in hand with fiscal decentralisation to prevent accountability gaps at the local level (World Bank, 2017).

KEY LESSON FOR MALAWI

Conditional performance-related fiscal transfers that link WASH data submission compliance to district budget allocations are Malawi's highest-leverage Phase III instrument for subnational integration. Kenya's experience confirms this mechanism works. But also that it must be preceded by fiduciary capacity building to avoid accountability gaps at the district level.

The evidence from these four country examples points to a clear lesson. The value of JSR governance depends not only on how frequently reviews are held, but rather on the institutional level of accountability, tracking, and enforcement mechanisms that are functional between annual cycles. Every country that shifted from an event-based to system-based method of governance achieved it in the same order. Establishing a strong accountability infrastructure before transitioning to fiscal.

IMPLICATION

The comparative evidence from Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Kenya establishes an invariant reform sequence. Accountability infrastructure precedes performance gains. JSR quality is determined not only by review frequency but by what happens between reviews. And across all four comparator countries, it is the secretariat function, the undertakings tracking mechanism, and the enforcement architecture that determine whether a JSR produces governance outcomes or governance theatre.

Uganda's Secretariat model demonstrates that institutionalised tracking directly translates into budget influence. Ghana's indicator harmonisation confirms that low-resistance, high-leverage data reforms yield measurable SPR quality improvement within two cycles. Tanzania's experience with development partner accountability frameworks reveals the risks of introducing financial oversight frameworks without enforcement architecture. Kenya's fiscal decentralisation reform confirms that incentive-linked data submission drives subnational engagement.

The transferable lesson across all four cases is unambiguous. Malawi's reform trajectory must establish accountability infrastructure first. Secretariat, tracking, and enforcement. Before advancing to financing and data complexity reforms.

The consistency of reform sequencing across all four comparator countries confirms that the transition from event-based to system-based JSR governance follows a predictable institutional pathway. This strengthens the external validity of the reform model proposed for Malawi and supports its applicability in comparable sector governance contexts.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature that underpins the assessment of Malawi's Water and Sanitation JSR system. It examines four intersecting bodies of scholarship. Principal–agent theory as applied to public sector accountability, results-based management frameworks in low-income reform contexts, sector-wide approach (SWAp) governance literature, and the institutional pathology of isomorphic mimicry. Taken together, these frameworks explain both why JSR systems emerge in aid-dependent contexts and under what structural conditions they fall short of their accountability potential. The chapter situates these theoretical foundations within the empirical evidence on JSR practice and WASH sector governance in sub-Saharan Africa, providing the analytical grounding for the diagnostic tests applied in Chapter 4.

3.2 Principal–Agent Theory and Accountability Asymmetry

This assessment is grounded in principal–agent theory, drawing on Laffont and Tirole's (1993) foundational treatment of incentives and delegation, with Savedoff's application of the framework to sector governance. This framework explains why governance systems systematically underperform when monitoring capacity is limited, incentives are misaligned, and accountability obligations are unevenly distributed across sector actors. In the principal–agent framework, principals (those who delegate authority) seek to influence the behaviour of agents (those entrusted with executing mandates), but face persistent information asymmetries that limit their capacity to verify agent performance.

Applied to the water sector governance context, Savedoff and Spiller (1999) argue that institutional performance depends critically on incentive structures, credible commitments, and information flows between governments, regulators, and service providers. From a principal–agent perspective, weak monitoring arrangements and asymmetric information reduce accountability by limiting principals' ability to verify agent performance and creating incentives for selective reporting of implementation challenges.

In the context of Malawi's Water JSR, three principal–agent relationships are analytically significant. First, central government (principal) and district-level implementers (agents), who carry service delivery responsibility but operate under fiscal constraints and capacity deficits that limit reporting fidelity. Second, development partners (principals) and government (agents), where partner

dependence on government reporting produces informational asymmetries that favour optimistic performance representation over bottleneck transparency.. Third, government (principal) and development partners (agents controlling the majority of sector capital financing), where the absence of independent disbursement verification creates a structural barrier to symmetric accountability.

A gap explicitly at odds with the mutual accountability commitments embedded in the Paris Declaration (OECD, 2005) and Sanitation and Water for All (SWA, 2021) frameworks.

Importantly, not all observed performance gaps reflect deliberate opportunism; many are structural consequences of fiscal volatility, under-resourced monitoring systems, and institutional capacity deficits. The analytical value of principal–agent theory in this study lies not primarily in attributing intent or blame, but in identifying where accountability relationships are weakened because formal obligations are not adequately supported by institutional arrangements, information systems, enforcement mechanisms, or implementation capacity (Laffont & Tirole, 1993).

3.3 Results-Based Management Theory and Premature Load-Bearing

Principal–agent analysis is reinforced by results-based management (RBM) perspectives applied to public sector reform, which emphasise that accountability systems require more than clearly defined performance indicators and monitoring frameworks. Sustainable accountability depends on the existence of institutional mechanisms that create consequences for performance, including credible links between results, resource allocation, and decision-making processes (Binnendijk, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock (2017) extend this argument by demonstrating that reforms can fail when sophisticated institutional arrangements are introduced before the underlying implementation capabilities, incentives, and organisational routines required to sustain them are established.

The tendency of reform programmes in developing countries to adopt formally sophisticated accountability mechanisms. Sector reviews, shared accountability compacts, undertakings matrices.

Before the institutional capacity to enforce them has been established. The consequence is that technically elaborate review processes produce reports that go unacted upon, precisely because the enforcement infrastructure and accountability architecture do not exist to translate analytical findings into corrective action.

Applied to Malawi's JSR, this framework generates a specific prediction. Adding technically sophisticated financing gap analysis or multi-indicator performance scorecards to the review process before formalising the secretariat function, undertakings enforcement, and symmetric accountability obligations will yield thorough documentation without governance traction.

This sequencing logic, consolidating accountability infrastructure before introducing complex fiscal and results-integration reforms, is theoretically grounded in results-based management and public sector reform scholarship, which emphasises that performance systems require underlying institutional capacity, credible incentives, and operational routines to function effectively (Binnendijk, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). It is also consistent with Andrews. M (2017) argument that reforms may fail when technically sophisticated systems are introduced before organisations possess the capabilities required to implement and sustain them. Comparative evidence from WASH sector governance reforms in Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Kenya further suggests that effective sector accountability mechanisms depend on gradual institutionalisation of coordination platforms, performance monitoring systems, and implementation follow-up arrangements.

3.4 Sector-Wide Approaches and the Conditions for Governance Value

The sector-wide approach (SWAp) governance literature provides a complementary analytical perspective. Brown et al. (2001) demonstrate that SWAps generate governance value when they are supported by strong government ownership, coordinated stakeholder arrangements, harmonised financing arrangements, shared monitoring systems, and institutional mechanisms that promote mutual accountability among government and development partners. In the absence of these institutional elements, SWAps may risk reinforcing aid dependency, weakening incentives for domestic resource mobilisation, and limiting incentives for transparent performance reporting

This literature is directly pertinent to the Malawian context, where development partner financing constitutes an estimated 85 percent of water sector capital investment (MoWS, 2025). When financial accountability obligations are asymmetrically concentrated on government actors while partner disbursements remain outside the review framework, SWAp coordination structures risk reinforcing the dependency dynamics that SWAp architecture was designed to mitigate. The Paris Declaration (OECD, 2005) and the SWA Mutual Accountability Mechanism (SWA, 2021) both affirm that symmetric accountability.

Applying equally to government and development partners, this is a foundational requirement for effective sector-wide governance. WaterAid's analytical work on JSR effectiveness (WaterAid, 2020) reinforces this point: sector review systems

function as governance tools only when embedded in continuous performance management cycles. Treated as standalone coordination events, they lose that power. Danert et al. (2016) provide a corresponding quality framework, establishing that robust JSR systems require formalised stewardship structures, harmonised evidence systems, enforceable undertakings tracking, and explicit calendar alignment with national budget and planning cycles.

3.5 Isomorphic Mimicry and the Capability Trap

A fourth body of literature addresses the structural conditions under which governance systems acquire the outward form of accountability instruments while lacking the institutional functions required for effective implementation. Pritchett, Woolcock, and Andrews (2013) characterise this dynamic as isomorphic mimicry, describing how governance systems in aid-dependent contexts may adopt the visible architecture of accountability, such as regular review cycles, undertakings matrices, and multi-stakeholder participation structures, without developing the enforcement authority, consequence mechanisms, and reciprocal accountability arrangements necessary for these instruments to produce meaningful change. Andrews (2017) extend this analysis through the concept of capability traps, where organisations maintain the appearance of functioning institutions while lacking the practical capabilities required to solve implementation problems. In such contexts, visible indicators of a functioning review process, regular convening, participation records, and published sector performance reports, may coexist with persistent weaknesses in undertaking follow-through, financing transparency, and evidence-to-decision linkages.

This concept has significant explanatory power for the pattern observed across multiple JSR cycles in Malawi, where recurring undertakings across successive review years suggest that the gap between procedural activity and institutional function has not been systematically closed. Because the outward architecture of the JSR is already in place. Annual convening, technical working groups, sector performance reporting. The reform imperative is not to build new structures but to fill existing structures with the enforcement capacity, analytical discipline, and symmetric accountability obligations they currently lack.

3.6 Aid Effectiveness Norms and Mutual Accountability Frameworks

The international aid effectiveness architecture provides the normative framework within which JSR reciprocal accountability obligations are situated. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005) establishes five core principles. Ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results orientation, and mutual accountability. With particular relevance to the symmetric accountability dimension of sector reviews. The Declaration requires both recipient

governments and development partners to accept accountability for development outcomes, a principle not yet fully institutionalised in Malawi's JSR architecture.

The Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Two-Way Accountability Mechanism (SWA, 2021) translates these principles into WASH-sector-specific commitments, requiring all signatories – both governments and development partners – to make public, trackable commitments on financing, institutional strengthening, and policy implementation, and to report on fulfilment. Malawi's commitments under this mechanism (SWA, 2023) provide an additional reference standard against which JSR undertakings can be benchmarked. The African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) reinforces the importance of evidence-based monitoring, partnerships, and coordinated implementation within Africa's continental governance architecture. Through its role in supporting Agenda 2063 implementation and performance reporting, AUDA-NEPAD contributes to strengthening accountability mechanisms for achieving continental development outcomes, including sustainable management of water and natural resources (African Union Commission & African Union Development Agency–NEPAD, 2022).

3.7 WASH Sector Performance Evidence in Sub-Saharan Africa

The empirical literature on WASH sector performance in sub-Saharan Africa provides the comparative baseline against which Malawi's sectoral trajectory is situated. Murray et al. (2024), analysing monitoring data from 1,805 rural water points across nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, demonstrate that long-term functionality is strongly associated with effective operations and maintenance arrangements, including operational water management committees, maintenance responsibility, and community financial savings.

Evidence from rural water systems across sub-Saharan Africa indicates a persistent build–neglect–rebuild cycle, where infrastructure investments are prioritised over long-term service delivery arrangements, resulting in declining functionality and repeated rehabilitation needs. This pattern reflects weaknesses in lifecycle planning, operations and maintenance financing, institutional accountability, and monitoring systems (Lockwood & Smits, 2011; World Bank, 2017). UN-Water's GLAAS 2022 report (UN-Water, 2022) identifies financing adequacy, institutional capacity, and data systems as the three principal constraints on SDG 6 progress across low-income countries. UNICEF Malawi budget briefs (UNICEF, 2025, UNICEF, 2024) provide country-specific evidence that budget allocations to the water and sanitation sector remain below indicative SDG 6 attainment thresholds, and that operations and maintenance expenditure is disproportionately low relative to capital investment. Confirming the lifecycle sustainability risk identified in the global literature.

Comparative evidence from Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Kenya suggests that Joint Sector Reviews are most effective where clear accountability arrangements, agreed performance frameworks, and institutional follow-up mechanisms are

established before expanding analytical complexity. Countries with stronger governance and monitoring arrangements have generally demonstrated more consistent sector learning and implementation than those where technical review processes outpaced institutional accountability (Holvoet & Inberg, 2009; Holvoet et al., 2014).

3.8 Synthesis and Analytical Framework for the Assessment

The literature reviewed in this chapter converges on a common analytical conclusion. The effectiveness of JSR systems does not depend on how often reviews are held or how complex the indicators are. It depends on the institutional infrastructure that links findings to corrective action. Principal-agent theory identifies the structural conditions under which information asymmetries and misaligned incentives prevent accountability, results-based management theory specifies the institutional prerequisites for reform traction, SWAp governance scholarship establishes the conditions under which sector coordination generates rather than merely performs accountability value, and the isomorphic mimicry literature explains the persistence of accountability-adjacent architecture in the absence of accountability substance. Taken together, these frameworks generate five analytical propositions that structure the diagnostic assessment in Chapter 4. (i) symmetric accountability obligations covering both government and development partner actors are a structural prerequisite for effective joint accountability (OECD, 2005), (ii) accountability infrastructure—Formalised secretariat functions, structured undertakings tracking, and escalation mechanisms—should precede the introduction of technically sophisticated analytical systems if reforms are to develop institutional traction. This sequencing reflects Andrews' (2017) argument that complex reform models are unlikely to generate sustained improvements when introduced before the underlying organisational capabilities, routines, and accountability mechanisms required for implementation are established, (iii) JSR systems function as governance tools only when embedded in year-round performance management cycles aligned with national budget and planning calendars (Danert et al., 2016, WaterAid, 2020), (iv) financing adequacy analysis, including lifecycle sustainability and development partner disbursement reconciliation, is a core accountability function of effective sector reviews (UN-Water, 2022, UNICEF, 2025), and (v) climate resilience metrics must be integrated into core performance monitoring frameworks in high-vulnerability contexts to avoid systematic understatement of sector risk (IPCC, 2022).

The six-test diagnostic framework applied in this assessment operationalises these propositions into structured evaluative criteria, drawing on the JSR quality standards established by Danert et al. (2016) and the continental monitoring benchmarks set by AUC and AMCOW (2026). This framework is designed to be directly replicable across comparable WASH governance contexts, generating cross-national evidence on the gap between JSR procedural activity and institutional function.

4.0 Analytical Framework and Diagnostic Logic

This assessment applies a structured diagnostic framework to evaluate JSR governance performance across four dimensions and six analytical pillars. The framework operationalises international best practice into a measurable scoring system, enabling replicable cross-country benchmarking. The full framework, including the WASH Accountability Architecture, dimensional definitions, pillar descriptions, and rating logic, is presented in Section 5.8. All findings in Chapter 5 are organised against this framework.

Table 1: Diagnostic framework. Dimensions and analytical pillars

DIMENSION	ANALYTICAL PILLARS
I. Institutional Foundations	Undertakings tracking, Secretariat function
II. Information & Evidence	SPR analytical depth, Indicator harmonisation
III. Accountability mechanisms	Financing architecture, DP accountability
IV. Governance & Feedback	Calendar alignment, Climate resilience integration

Each pillar is scored 0–3 (Non-Existent → Strong). Full rating definitions are in Section 5.8.

The stakeholder survey supporting the Joint Sector Review assessment has now expanded significantly beyond the preliminary dataset presented during the consultation and includes 126 completed responses from across Malawi's water sector. The sample is strongly implementation-oriented, with district-level institutions accounting for approximately 52 percent of respondents, followed by civil society organisations, water boards, irrigation scheme representatives, national institutions, and basin-level actors. Smaller but important contributions are also drawn from the private sector and catchment management structures.

This distribution reflects the institutional architecture of the sector and ensures that the assessment captures operational perspectives alongside national policy and coordination views. The demographic profile of respondents indicates that the survey draws on an experienced professional base. The majority of respondents fall within the 26–45 age range, with a further significant share between 46–55 years, suggesting that the perspectives captured reflect substantial institutional memory and practical experience in sector

implementation. The survey also achieved coverage across 15 districts, including Blantyre, Chikwawa, Dedza, Dowa, Karonga, Lilongwe, Machinga, Mangochi, Mchinji, Mulanje, Mwanza, Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Ntcheu, and Rumphi in Section 5.9 and Annex G. Both components were administered as a single paired instrument, they are described separately in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 for analytical clarity.

4.1 Study Design

This assessment employed a three-phase convergent parallel mixed-methods design governed by a convergent parallel protocol (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To ensure analytical integrity and minimise cognitive bias, each phase was conducted independently before final synthesis, enabling genuine triangulation rather than sequential corroboration. The three-phase architecture facilitated a rigorous convergence testing model. By integrating top-down benchmarking (Phase I) with bottom-up practitioner insights (Phase II) and real-time stress-testing (Phase III), the study ensures that reform guidance is both empirically grounded and operationally feasible within the MIP-1 framework.

4.2 Phase I. Document Review (Benchmarking and Gap Analysis)

Phase I applied a benchmark-based diagnostic comparison through a structured systematic document review. Documents were selected based on their role as formal institutional records of JSR governance, sector performance, and accountability commitments. National JSR approaches were audited against predefined robustness criteria derived from WSAU (2025) and Danert et al. (2016). Documents were screened against a predefined relevance framework covering SPR quality, JSR governance process design, accountability channels, indicator systems, and sector governance performance.

The following primary documents were reviewed.

- Water Sector Performance Reports for 2023, 2024, and 2025
- 2023 National Water JSR Draft Report (MoWS, 2023)
- National Water JSR Final Report (MoWS, 2024)
- 2025 WASH Sector Joint Review Meeting Report, BICC Lilongwe (MoWS, 2025)
- Southern Region JSR Documentation (December 2023 and December 2024)
- MoWS Strategic Plan 2025–2030 (Government of Malawi, 2025d)
- National Water Policy 2023 (Government of Malawi)
- National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy (Government of Malawi, 2024a)

- National Irrigation Policy (Government of Malawi, 2024b)
- Malawi 2063 and MIP-1
- Relevant international documents. SDGs, AU Agenda 2063, Africa Water Vision 2025

4.3 Phase II. Primary Data Collection

The survey comprised two analytically distinct but operationally unified components, described separately in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

4.3.1 QUALITATIVE COMPONENT. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The qualitative component of the IWMI JSR Assessment Survey comprised in-depth, semi-structured interview questions designed to elicit narrative, contextual, and experiential insight understanding the why and how behind observed governance patterns. This component cannot be aggregated statistically, it provides depth, not breadth. One hundred and twenty-six key informants were purposively selected across eight institutional categories drawn from the broader survey population of 126 respondents (see Table 2). Data saturation was assessed thematically within each category, no substantive new structural themes emerged after the third or fourth informant within any group.

4.3.2 QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT. STRUCTURED RATING QUESTIONS

The quantitative component of the IWMI JSR Assessment Survey was a structured rating instrument administered to all 126 survey respondents, including the 126 key informants who also completed the qualitative component, as part of the same Phase II data collection session. Respondents rated key dimensions of JSR governance quality on a five-point scale (1 = Very Weak to 5 = Very Strong), enabling cross-institutional statistical comparison. This component provides breadth and statistical comparability, its limitation is the absence of the contextual depth generated by the qualitative component. The full survey instrument encompassing both components is reproduced in Annex F. The qualitative and quantitative components were integrated within each respondent session, ensuring analytical coherence.

Table 2: Diagnostic framework. Dimensions and analytical pillars

INSTITUTIONAL CATEGORY	N	%
District councils and district offices	66	52.4
Civil society organisations	15	11.9
Water boards and utilities	12	9.5
Irrigation schemes and WUAs	11	8.7
National institutions	10	7.9
Regional and basin authorities	7	5.6
Private sector	3	2.4
Catchment management committees	2	1.6
Total	126	100

Purposive stratification was adopted over random sampling because the diagnostic questions required institutional depth rather than statistical representativeness (Yin, 2018, Miles et al., 2020).

4.4 Phase III. Structured Validation Workshop

The final phase comprised a structured validation Consultative Meeting held on 12 March 2026. In a departure from standard validation exercises, working groups were provided with raw summary findings from Phases I and II as structured prompts rather than conclusions. This ‘blind diagnostic test’ evaluated whether practitioners would independently converge on the same structural characterisations and performance trajectories identified in the earlier analytical streams. The full convergence of findings across all three phases substantially reinforced the reliability of the diagnostic conclusions and reform priorities presented in this report.

4.5 Theoretical Framework

This assessment adopted principal–agent theory (Laffont & Tirole, 1993) to scrutinise Malawi’s Water JSR governance dynamics, identifying structural conditions under which principals (government ministries, development partners) cannot monitor or enforce agent behaviour due to information asymmetries, misaligned incentives, and absent consequences. Three principal–agent relationships are analytically relevant. (i) central government and district-level implementers, (ii) development partners and government, and (iii)

government and development partners controlling the majority of sector financing.

This analysis is reinforced by results-based management (RBM) theory in low-income public sector reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Andrews (2017) demonstrate how reform initiatives in developing countries often introduce formal accountability mechanisms before the institutional capabilities required to operate and enforce them have been established. They describe this broader pattern as a capability trap, where externally designed or highly sophisticated institutional arrangements may create the appearance of effective governance while exceeding the implementation capacity of existing organisations.

The assessment also utilises the concept of Isomorphic Mimicry (Pritchett et al., 2013) to interrogate the ‘Signal vs. Substance’ gap within the WASH JSR, providing analytical purchase on why visible indicators of a functional review coexist with a structural absence of enforcement authority.

JSR EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK

The logic chain in Figure 1 underpins this assessment’s analytical approach to JSR effectiveness.



Figure 1: JSR Effectiveness Framework

Each link in this chain is a diagnostic entry point. A breakdown at any stage, whether in data quality, commitment tracking, or enforcement, disrupts the entire accountability logic. The framework is used throughout this report to locate specific institutional failures within the broader governance system.

Overall, the survey results indicate that the Joint Sector Review system is moderately functional but structurally constrained. The system is operational and widely recognised as an important platform for dialogue. However, it remains only partially institutionalised. As a result, it does not consistently drive accountability, follow-through, or performance improvement. This is the central argument running through every finding. Malawi's JSR underperformance is not a process failure but a systemic governance gap driven by lack of year-round accountability systems.

All findings in this chapter are mapped against the JSR effectiveness chain established in Section 4.5 (Data → Review → Commitments → Tracking → Accountability → Performance). And each subsection identifies which specific link is failing and what breaks downstream as a consequence.

5.1 Governance and Coordination

The findings confirm that coordination remains one of the central institutional weaknesses of the current JSR system. Respondents rated the adequacy and sustainability of the institutional arrangement for coordinating the JSR at 2.84, indicating a weak-to-moderate level of functionality.

While a coordination structure exists and is recognised, it is not consistently perceived as sufficiently resourced, stable, or authoritative to ensure continuity of the process throughout the year. Data shows that the challenge is not the absence of coordination mechanisms, but rather their limited institutional strength and ability to provide sustained stewardship between review cycles.

Documentary and survey evidence shows that while a JSR Secretariat exists, it operates under chronic resource constraints, limiting its ability to effectively coordinate sector actors. Institutional anchoring of the JSR remains weak, reducing its authority to convene stakeholders and enforce compliance across ministries. Coordination across technical departments is fragmented, with limited engagement from non-WASH sector ministries.

In practice, governance structures are formally established. Validation workshop findings confirm the existence of three Technical Working Groups (TWGs) led by government directors, supported by quarterly TWG meetings, biannual Sector Working Group (SWG) meetings, and an annual JSR. Terms of Reference are in place, and participation includes government, development partners, and civil society organisations.

Despite these structures, operational challenges persist. Meeting schedules are inconsistently adhered to due to competing institutional priorities and coordination constraints, while participation remains uneven even when review meetings are convened. SPRs, which provide a critical evidence base for JSR deliberations, are not always prepared or finalised within predictable timelines, limiting the effectiveness of evidence-based review and accountability processes (WaterAid Malawi, 2025). Participation and district engagement emerge as comparatively stronger elements of the JSR system. District participation in preparing inputs for the national JSR is rated at 3.41. The effectiveness of regional and district review processes as accountability instruments is rated at 3.36.

These scores indicate that stakeholders perceive the system as relatively inclusive and capable of capturing subnational perspectives. However, this strength is not fully translated into improved outcomes, as participation is not consistently linked to enforceable commitments, resource allocation, or structured follow-up. Findings indicate that while the system is effective at convening stakeholders, it remains less effective at converting participation into tangible improvements in sector performance.

This failure at the institutional foundations stage of the JSR effectiveness chain structurally prevents the JSR from functioning as a mutual accountability mechanism. Without a mandated Secretariat with year-round authority, no other reform can achieve durable results (Danert et al., 2016, Global Partnership for Education, 2017).

Implication. While a JSR coordination structure exists, it is not adequately resourced or empowered. Without formal authority, it cannot effectively coordinate the JSR process or ensure follow-up on agreed actions. A JSR secretariate without authority, resource allocation, and a year-round mandate can not perform its role effectively. Without this, coordination gaps will persist regardless of the quality of individual recommendations.

5.2 Data Systems and Sector Performance

The breakdown at the data stage of the JSR effectiveness chain undermines the reliability of downstream functions, including review, commitment-setting, and accountability. Findings demonstrate significant weaknesses in the sector data systems that underpin JSR governance processes. Sector assessments indicate persistent challenges related to fragmented information systems, limited consolidation of sector data, and inadequate mechanisms for generating a unified evidence base for decision-making. The absence of a fully operational and integrated national WASH Management Information System (MIS) constrains the sector's ability to aggregate, validate, analyse, and use performance data effectively during sector review processes (Ministry of Water and Sanitation, 2025). In addition, inconsistent definitions across reporting frameworks and

reliance on partner-reported data without independent verification undermine data reliability. While JSR findings are acknowledged by policy actors and influence sector discourse, their integration into planning is constrained by misalignment between the JSR calendar and national planning cycles, as well as limited financial resources to implement identified priorities.

Validation workshop findings confirm that reporting structures are formally defined, with data flowing from TWGs to SWG and ultimately to the JSR. Tools such as matrix templates are used to track undertakings, and institutions such as WESNET support NGO data coordination. District Water Teams play a role in data collection.

The findings suggest that the evidence base underpinning the JSR remains fragmented and only partially reliable. The quality and usefulness of the Sector Performance Report is rated at 2.89. The consistency of district data systems is rated just above 3.0. This reflects a system in which data is available but not yet sufficiently harmonised, integrated, or trusted to support robust decision-making. Respondents recognise the importance of evidence in the review process, but continue to highlight challenges related to data quality, comparability, timeliness, and alignment across institutions. This fragmentation limits the ability of the JSR to function as a fully evidence-driven accountability platform.

Sector data systems are fragmented and, to some extent, weakly institutionalised, significantly constraining the JSR's ability to function as an evidence-based performance review and planning mechanism. The breakdown at the tracking stage of the JSR effectiveness chain prevents commitments from translating into enforceable action.

IMPLICATION

Without a unified, interoperable WASH MIS and harmonised M&E framework and indicator definitions, the JSR will continue to review contested data rather than agreed facts. Data reform is not a technical nicety. It is a precondition for meaningful accountability.

5.3 Accountability and Follow-up of Commitments

The breakdown at the tracking stage of the JSR effectiveness chain confirms that commitments made are commitments lost. Findings consistently demonstrate a structurally incomplete accountability architecture within the JSR governance system. Survey data establishes that commitments made during JSR sessions are not systematically documented or tracked, and there is no standardised digital mechanism to monitor undertakings (WaterAid, 2020, Wild & Foresti, 2013). Technical Working Groups (TWGs) face capacity limitations and inconsistent meeting patterns, weakening follow-up, coordination, and accountability processes. This reflects a broader governance challenge in aid-dependent contexts, where formal coordination and accountability arrangements may be established without the institutional capacity, incentives, and enforcement mechanisms required to make them effective (OECD, 2005; Andrews 2017). High staff turnover at both district and national levels contributes to loss of institutional memory, resulting in repeated discussions of unresolved issues across successive JSR cycles.

Validation workshop findings reinforce these patterns. Although commitments are made during meetings, they are rarely followed through in a structured manner. Reporting by NGOs, private sector actors, and government institutions is inconsistent, and communication of commitments to stakeholders is often inadequate.

While there are positive developments, such as improved stakeholder mobilisation and increasing alignment of WASH indicators with national frameworks (e.g., MIP-1 and Malawi 2063), these have not translated into strengthened accountability systems.

Key weaknesses include unclear roles and responsibilities for tracking commitments, weak reporting mechanisms, and poor dissemination of information. These gaps collectively undermine transparency and limit the effectiveness of the JSR as a shared accountability platform.

KEY FINDING

The JSR lacks a systematic accountability and follow-up mechanism, resulting in weak implementation of agreed actions and this leads to repeated policy discussions without resolution. This failure at the tracking stage of the JSR effectiveness chain structurally prevents the JSR from functioning as a mutual accountability mechanism. Without enforcement, commitments are indistinguishable from aspirations (WaterAid, 2020, Wild & Foresti, 2013).

IMPLICATION

The survey highlights a clear and persistent weakness in the follow-up of commitments agreed during JSR processes. Indicators related to the strength and enforceability of undertakings (2.86) and the effectiveness of mechanisms to monitor and escalate commitments between cycles (2.83) fall within the weak-to-moderate range.

Similarly, the overall effectiveness of the JSR as a reciprocal accountability mechanism is rated at 2.89. These findings indicate that while commitments are routinely made during review processes, they are not consistently translated into a structured and enforceable chain of action. As a result, the JSR functions more effectively as a platform for dialogue than as a mechanism for ensuring systematic follow-through and accountability.

5.4 Participation of Stakeholders

The findings show that stakeholder participation in the JSR is uneven across levels. At the national level, participation is relatively strong, with representation from government, development partners, and civil society organisations. The JSR governance process is coordinated by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), with development partners and NGOs supporting implementation and reporting.

Community stakeholders contribute local-level information, although their participation is indirect and often mediated through district structures. Notably, district-level participation in national JSR governance processes is largely dependent on donor funding, raising concerns about sustainability.

Validation workshop findings indicate that while government commitment to leading the JSR governance process is evident, several participation challenges remain. Financial constraints significantly limit the inclusion of district and community actors (UNICEF, 2024,). There is also limited awareness of the JSR's purpose and importance among stakeholders, particularly at sub-national levels.

Private sector participation remains limited in many African water sectors, with weak engagement of private operators and non-state actors constraining inclusive sector coordination and service delivery models (Chan & Ameyaw, 2013). However, opportunities exist to strengthen participation, including the presence of regional JSR platforms, existing studies and guidance materials, and emerging practices where some districts conduct annual district-level JSRs.

KEY FINDING

Stakeholder participation in the JSR is broad but shallow, with strong national-level engagement but limited and unsustainable inclusion of district, community, and private sector actors (Water Witness International, 2023, WESNet, 2024). This failure at the governance and feedback stage of the JSR effectiveness chain structurally prevents the JSR from capturing subnational service realities. The very evidence base required to generate accountability for outcomes rather than outputs.

IMPLICATION

Without sustained mechanisms for district, community, and private-sector engagement, the evidence generated by the JSR will continue to reflect national-level perspectives only. Without district inclusion, the JSR will continue to miss the subnational realities that determine whether WASH services are functional or failing.

OVERALL SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

Across all thematic areas, the convergent evidence establishes that the JSR is institutionally established but structurally incapable of enforcing accountability. While structures, processes, and stakeholder platforms are in place, a causal chain of institutional failures. At the data, tracking, and accountability stages of the JSR effectiveness chain. Systematically prevents formal governance arrangements from producing sector outcomes. The evidence is unambiguous. The JSR requires institutional redesign, not incremental process improvement.

5.4.1 UNDERTAKINGS CREDIBILITY GAP

The 2025 JSR produced 23 undertakings. Diagnostic review found that 14 of 23 lacked named responsible individuals, weakening enforceability (WSAU, 2025). No undertaking addresses development partner financial disbursement obligations. Undertakings completion rates of 40–60% per cycle are consistent with the structural follow-up weakness predicted by results-based management theory for systems without institutionalised consequence mechanisms.

5.5 Policy Review

5.5.1 INVENTORY OF EXISTING POLICIES AND ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL AND CONTINENTAL TARGETS

Malawi's WASH policy architecture is formally strong. Multiple policies are current, aligned to SDG 6, and reference continental commitments. The revised National Water Policy (2023) provides the normative framework emphasising sustainability and climate resilience (Government of Malawi, 2023). The National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy (2024) and Hygiene Strategy (2025–2030) align with SDG 6.2 (Government of Malawi, 2024a, UN-Water, 2022).

The Climate-Resilient WASH Financing Strategy (2022–2032) introduces resilience-adjusted financing principles (UNICEF, 2025). Policy alignment is strong across three vertical tiers. National development strategy, continental commitments, and global SDG obligations. Yet JSR reporting does not consistently cross-reference any of these three framework levels. This is an institutional gap confirmed across all three evidence streams. This failure at the review stage of the JSR effectiveness chain structurally prevents the JSR from demonstrating national accountability against the very commitments it is mandated to enforce.

5.5.2 POLICY CONSISTENCY, COHERENCE, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Malawi's WASH policy environment demonstrates strong strategic alignment across national, continental, and global frameworks, but operational coherence remains structurally incomplete. The pattern observed here. Robust vertical policy alignment coexisting with weak horizontal coherence between financing structures and implementation mandates. Is a textbook manifestation of isomorphic mimicry (Pritchett et al., 2013). The sector adopts globally recognised policy architecture to secure institutional legitimacy while failing to develop the internal enforcement infrastructure required to operationalise those commitments.

The IWMI JSR Primary Assessment confirms this diagnosis. Stakeholders across all eight institutional categories characterise the gap between policy intent and operational delivery as the sector's most persistent governance failure, and no evidence stream provided a conflicting signal. This is not a policy design problem. The policies are adequate. It is an enforcement architecture problem, and it is precisely what the reforms proposed in Chapter 6 are designed to address.

5.5.3 GAPS IN POLICY MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Documentary evidence. O&M financing and lifecycle asset management costs are absent from the JSR's monitoring architecture across all three review cycles (2023–2025). No SPR includes O&M expenditure as a tracked indicator or

benchmarks recurrent allocations against lifecycle costing norms (WSAU, 2025, MoWS, 2025).

KEY IMPLICATION.

The JSR cannot track the sustainability gap, the difference between capital investment made and recurring revenue required to maintain assets over their lifespan until O&M financing is added to the SPR indicator set.

5.6 Institutional Review

5.6.1 INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Malawi's WASH sector is governed through a multi-institutional architecture. At its centre sits the Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MoWS), the body with primary responsibility for policy, sector coordination, and performance reporting. Regulatory oversight of water resources is vested in the National Water Resources Authority (NWRA). Urban water supply and sanitation services are delivered through Water Boards. District Councils hold formal delivery mandates for rural WASH under the Local Government Act (Government of Malawi, 1998). Formal institutional clarity coexists with overlapping mandates, coordination bottlenecks, and capacity constraints.

5.6.2 COORDINATION STRUCTURES AND PARTICIPATION OF NON-STATE ACTORS

WASH sector coordination is structured through a Sector Working Group (SWG) supported by Technical Working Groups (TWGs). The JSR is formally structured as a multi-stakeholder accountability platform with documented regular participation from CSOs and sector actors. However, the depth and influence of participation remain sharply uneven. The Consultative Meeting (12 March 2026) confirmed that the perceived 'lack' of private sector participation is a constraint imposed by governance design rather than market disinterest, and that current NGO reporting practices represent a significant structural accountability gap. Private sector actors operating in the water and sanitation space, including borehole drillers, pump suppliers, water kiosk operators, and sanitation construction firms, are not assigned formal roles within the TWG or SWG architecture, nor are they invited to disclose their operational data as part of the SPR preparation process.

This absence means that a growing segment of service delivery activity falls outside the JSR's accountability perimeter. The diagnostic evidence is consistent with the supply-side institutional design problem identified in Section 5.9. Addressing private sector marginalisation requires not outreach campaigns but structural design changes, including defined participation pathways, clear data disclosure expectations, and recognition of private actors as contributors to the undertakings framework rather than merely observers of it.

5.6.3 CAPACITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Implementation and monitoring capacity varies considerably across sub-sectors. The diagnostic assessment identified inconsistent definitions and measurement approaches for water point functionality, limiting the validity of cross-cycle comparisons. This challenge reflects a broader sector-wide issue, where differing interpretations of “functional” water points—from simple operational status assessments to more comprehensive measures incorporating reliability, yield, and service continuity—constrain comparability of WASH performance data (Wilson et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2024). This data fragmentation is exacerbated by a critical human capital deficit. The reported 51% vacancy rate for technical WASH staff at national and district levels (MoWS, 2025) illustrates persistent institutional capacity constraints. While the district-level data collection infrastructure phase of the MIS rollout in March 2025 represents an important technical milestone, unresolved training gaps and underlying staffing shortages risk leaving the system as a “hollow” architecture—technically established but insufficiently resourced to generate, interpret, and use reliable performance data.

IMPLICATION FOR REFORM

Without resolving the vacancy crisis and completing MIS training, data harmonisation reforms will remain technically incomplete regardless of system investment.

5.6.4 INSTITUTIONAL GAPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARCHITECTURE

Key institutional gaps include fragmented monitoring systems, overlapping coordination mandates, limited regulatory enforcement, insufficient integration of life-cycle financing, and structural capacity deficits at the district level. Structural exclusion of DP disbursements from accountability scrutiny contradicts Paris Declaration mutual accountability obligations (OECD, 2005, SWA, 2021). Malawi’s current AU alignment score of 4/15 against the five AUC accountability principles reveals a significant ‘execution gap’ that must be bridged to reach the minimum acceptable threshold of 10/15 (AMCOW & AU, 2026).

5.7 Review of Financial and Non-Financial Commitments

5.7.1 GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS

Malawi’s WASH budget allocation increased to approximately 3.5% of the national budget in FY2025/26, representing a marginal improvement from previous years (UNICEF Malawi, 2025). However, this level of financing remains insufficient to close the investment gap required to achieve universal access to

safely managed water, sanitation, and hygiene services under SDG 6 by 2030. Moreover, the sustainability of current WASH financing remains constrained by high dependence on external resources, with donor financing accounting for a substantial share of sector funding (UNICEF Malawi, 2025).

The Ngor Declaration mandates at least 0.5% of annual GDP specifically to sanitation and hygiene. The broader eThekweni-Ngor-SDG6 framework advocates for a total investment of 1.5% of GDP. The sector's current allocation architecture shows an acute bias toward capital expenditure. Recurrent allocations are estimated to cover only 40–60% of required O&M expenditure. Actual transfers to District Councils have stagnated at approximately 1%, against a national policy target of 5%.

5.7.2 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS FINANCE 85% OF THE SECTOR BUT FACE NO JSR ACCOUNTABILITY

Development partners finance a substantial proportion of Malawi's WASH sector expenditure, estimated at approximately 85% of sector financing (MoWS, 2025; UNICEF, 2024). However, despite their significant financial role, development partner commitments and disbursement performance are not systematically tracked through a structured mutual accountability mechanism within the current JSR framework. This limits the ability of the sector to assess alignment between pledged resources, actual disbursements, and agreed sector priorities (Danert et al., 2016; Sanitation and Water for All [SWA], 2022)., Holvoet & Inberg, 2009). This structural exclusion is not an oversight. It is the most consequential design flaw in the JSR governance architecture. Key structural gaps include. No reconciliation of pledged versus actual disbursements, no assessment of financing alignment with national priority gaps, no structured reporting on project overlap or fragmentation, and no escalation mechanism for disbursement shortfalls (Wild & Foresti, 2013, Holvoet & Inberg, 2009). The March 2026 Consultative Meeting established a landmark consensus.

Development Partner Disbursement Annex within the JSR reform roadmap. However, reform requires that this opportunity is translated into a formal institutional mechanism for recording commitments, tracking disbursements, and reconciling pledged versus actual financing flows. Without such a reconciliation mechanism, the JSR risks continuing to assess sector performance without a complete view of the resources underpinning implementation. This weakens reciprocal accountability by limiting the ability of government and partners to jointly monitor financing commitments and delivery against agreed priorities (MoWS, 2025; Danert et al., 2016; Sanitation and Water for All [SWA], 2021).

7.3 Non-Financial Commitments and the Commitment Recycling Problem

The sector's process for recording non-financial commitments is confined to undertakings matrices with no digital tracking, no named owners for 14 of 23 undertakings, and no consequence mechanism for non-delivery. The result is

structurally predictable. The persistent recurrence of identical undertakings across successive JSR cycles. Key milestones. The establishment of the Coordination Unit, the finalisation of the WASH MIS, the reduction of district vacancy rates remain stalled across three consecutive review cycles.

The IWMI JSR Assessment confirms this finding, identifying the absence of systematic tracking mechanisms as a primary structural weakness across the assessed institutional categories. Cross-cycle evidence indicates that unresolved undertakings are repeatedly carried forward between review periods, suggesting a persistent accountability gap rather than an isolated implementation challenge. This reflects broader concerns in development governance regarding weak feedback loops, limited monitoring of commitments, and inadequate mechanisms for translating review decisions into corrective action (Wild & Foresti, 2013; Danert et al., 2016). It is the predictable outcome of a system designed to produce commitments without the institutional infrastructure to enforce them. This failure at the tracking stage of the JSR effectiveness chain directly prevents performance improvement at the accountability and performance stages downstream.

5.8 Water Sector Performance Baselines

5.8.1 ACCESS INDICATORS

While national water access is reported at 87.9%, this figure masks a profound service-level gap when measured against the 2030 target of universal ‘safely managed’ access. At current trajectory, the sector is not only failing to expand reach but witnessing a marginal decline from 88.3% in 2022/23 (MoWS, 2025, WSAU, 2025). Rural ‘safely managed’ access remains stalled at approximately 36%, compared to 57% in urban areas (WHO & UNICEF, 2023). With households currently bearing 59.3% of total WASH expenditure, the path to 2030 is fiscally unsustainable for the poorest quintiles.

5.8.2 SANITATION COVERAGE

National basic sanitation coverage continues to lag behind water access, characterised by significant rural–urban disparities and a lack of progress throughout the 2023–2025 review period (MoWS, 2025, WHO & UNICEF, 2023). Sanitation performance remains un-benchmarked against SDG 6.2 targets or MW2063 ODF commitments within the JSR dialogue. Addressing this requires elevating sanitation from a peripheral reporting line to a central, resilience-indexed pillar of the national WASH accountability system.

5.8.3 THE O&M CAUSATION CHAIN

The most diagnostically significant signal of the 2023–2025 review period is the marginal decline in water access occurring concurrently with the commissioning

of six large-scale water supply schemes (MoWS, 2025, WSAU, 2025). This is consistent with a critical Infrastructure-Sustainability Paradox. The sector is expanding its capital asset base while failing to preserve the functionality of its existing infrastructure.

Government allocations currently cover only 40–60% of necessary O&M expenditure (UNICEF, 2024, Bawi Consultants, 2017). Longitudinal evidence from Murray et al. (2024) indicates that functionality rates for water points drop from 92% to 79% within an average of 3.5 years post-construction, underscoring the likely consequences of sustained O&M financing shortfalls. This reflects a well-documented pattern in rural water services, where insufficient lifecycle financing systematically undermines infrastructure sustainability (World Bank, 2017, IRC, 2020).

Implication for Reform. Continued capital investment without ring-fenced O&M allocations will accelerate infrastructure decline. Each dollar invested in new assets without lifecycle financing provision actively worsens the functionality ratio of the existing asset base. This is not a data problem. It is a governance problem. And it is the predictable consequence of a JSR framework that tracks capital disbursements but has never been designed to track recurrent financing adequacy. Until O&M financing is added to the SPR indicator set and tracked against lifecycle costing norms, the Infrastructure-Sustainability Paradox will deepen regardless of the level of capital investment.

5.8.4 SDG 6 FINANCING ADEQUACY GAP

A forensic estimation of Malawi's financing gap reveals a stark misalignment between national ambitions and fiscal reality. The capital required to close basic drinking water (72%) and sanitation (29%) coverage gaps by 2030 is estimated at USD 706 million. This places the sector's annual financing requirement at approximately USD 121 million (lifecycle costing, mid-range scenario), against current total annual allocations of USD 60–70 million. a structural deficit of USD 50–60 million per year.

The mid-range scenario represents the most analytically defensible basis for reform planning, as it applies internationally recognised JMP 'safely managed' service-level standards and GLAAS O&M norms. Three implications follow directly. First, the USD 50–60 million annual gap is not a financing issue. It is a system failure to align commitments, disbursements, and lifecycle costs within a single accountable framework. Second, without reform, each dollar of capital investment accelerates asset failure by expanding an infrastructure base that recurrent financing cannot sustain. Third, closing the gap requires not more funding alone, but enforceable financing accountability. A mechanism that currently does not exist within the JSR framework. This structural gap corresponds to System Failure 3 and directly underpins Reform Priority 3 (Section 6.2).

Table 3: Four-Scenario WASH Financing Adequacy Model

SCENARIO	ANNUAL REQUIREMENT (USD M)	CURRENT FINANCING (USD M)	ANNUAL GAP (USD M)	ADEQUACY RATIO
	91	60–70	21–31	68–77%
Mid-Range (JMP safely managed, 20% O&M)	121	60–70	51–61	50–58%
SDG-Aligned (full GLAAS lifecycle costing)	149	60–70	79–89	40–47%
Aid Contraction (50% DP reduction, mid- range requirement)	121	30–40	81–91	25–33%

Source. Capital requirement estimates derived from WHO/UNICEF JMP coverage data (WHO & UNICEF, 2023) and GLAAS lifecycle costing norms (UN-Water, 2022). Current financing estimates based on MoWS (2025) and UNICEF (2024). O&M ratios applied as per scenario assumptions. The mid-range scenario is the primary planning baseline, the aid contraction scenario applies a 50% reduction in historic development partner disbursements consistent with UNICEF (2024) risk projections.

5.9 Diagnostic Tests of JSR Robustness

Six structured diagnostic tests, derived from WSAU (2025) and Danert et al. (2016), were applied systematically across the SPR–JSR cycle (WaterAid, 2016, Wild & Foresti, 2013). The Robustness Scorecard below summarises findings against the six analytical pillars of the diagnostic framework (see Section 5.8).

Table 4: JSR Robustness Scorecard. WASH Accountability Architecture (2026)

DIAGNOSTIC DIMENSION	RATING	KEY FINDING
SPR Analytical Depth	PARTIAL	Reporting is regular but lacks longitudinal trend analysis, equity disaggregation, and lifecycle sustainability metrics (MoWS, 2025, WSAU, 2025).
Indicator Harmonisation & Data Systems	WEAK	Siloed reporting platforms and conflicting indicator definitions prevent cross-cycle comparability. At least 4 definitions of functional water point in active use (WSAU, 2025).
Undertakings & Accountability Tracking	WEAK	No institutionalised tracking, 14/23 undertakings lack clear ownership, rendering commitments effectively voluntary (WSAU, 2025). Most universally identified weakness across all 6 survey categories.
Calendar Alignment & Budget Integration	PARTIAL	May JSR timing post-dates MTEF formulation, severing the link between sector performance evidence and budget prioritisation (Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, 2024).
Financing Architecture & Resource Adequacy	WEAK	85% aid dependency, 70–80% of partner funding deemed at-risk (UNICEF, 2024,). No DP disbursement reconciliation in JSR framework.
Climate Resilience Integration	PARTIAL	Resilience has increasingly emerged as a strategic theme in African water governance frameworks; however, it remains insufficiently operationalised through sector performance monitoring systems, with limited integration of resilience-adjusted indicators into SPRs (African Union Commission & African Ministers' Council on Water [AUC & AMCOW], 2026)

5.10 Political Economy of the Water JSR

The JSR's failure is not technical. It is incentive-driven. The current system allows all actors to participate in review without being exposed to consequence.

Government reports optimistically to retain donor confidence, development partners disburse selectively without disclosure obligations, and district councils engage when funded and disengage when they are not. Understanding this incentive architecture is essential to designing reforms that change behaviour rather than simply mandating it.

5.10.1 REPORTING INCENTIVES AND DATA CANDOUR

Documentary evidence across 2023–2025 confirms consistent under-reporting of bottlenecks and financing shortfalls relative to what key informants described in interviews (WSAU, 2025, MoWS, 2023, 2024, 2025). Three structural incentive tensions explain this pattern and define the political economy boundary conditions within which all reform must operate.

First, the Government and District tension. Fiscal authority remains at national level while service delivery accountability is devolved and implemented by districts, creating a principal–agent inversion in which districts bear responsibility without resources.

Second, the Government and Development Partner tension. With Development Partners (DPs) controlling 85% of capital, government lacks the institutional leverage to demand disbursement accountability, incentivising optimistic reporting to retain donor confidence.

Third, the DP–Accountability tension. Development partners finance the sector but face no formal disclosure obligations, creating a structural incentive to participate in review without exposure to consequence.

These three tensions do not make reform impossible. But they confirm that reforms designed to change behaviour must target incentive structures, not just procedures. SPR analytical improvements will not produce candid findings unless the incentive environment is restructured through mandatory DP disbursement disclosure, independent SPR validation, and performance-linked district fiscal transfers.

5.10.2 DONOR–GOVERNMENT DYNAMICS AND CENTRAL–LOCAL TENSIONS

The high degree of aid dependency creates a structural inversion of the traditional principal–agent model. Development partners agents are tasked with executing government-led plans. However they take greater leverage over the state because they control the majority of capital (MoWS, 2025, UNICEF, 2024).

Consequently, the government lacks the institutional leverage required to demand disbursement accountability. This directly explains why development partner disbursements have historically remained absent from JSR scrutiny (Holvoet & Inberg, 2009). A second principal–agent relationship exists between the central government and district councils. While district councils bear formal accountability for service delivery under the Local Government Act (1998), fiscal authority remains highly centralised.

These structural realities define the boundary conditions within which reform must operate. But they do not make reform impossible. They require that reforms be designed to change incentives rather than simply mandate new behaviours.

Three incentive shifts are necessary. (1) making JSR non-compliance visible and politically costly by introducing a mandatory DP Disbursement Annex and publishing undertakings completion rates publicly, (2) making accountability rewarding by linking district data submission compliance to conditional fiscal transfers, so that subnational actors gain tangible benefit from participating in the JSR governance system, and (3) shifting the SPR's candour incentive from optimistic reporting.

Currently, incentives are shaped by donor milestone alignment, which can constrain transparency. To address this, reforms should strengthen independent SPR validation and require mandatory disclosure of O&M financing gaps (Wild & Foresti, 2013). The reform pathways proposed in Chapter 6 are explicitly built around these three incentive shifts—not as technical aspirations, but as political economy interventions.

The survey evidence reinforces and sharpens the reform directions identified during the consultation. Across the dataset, respondents consistently emphasise the need to strengthen the institutional mechanisms that translate review processes into action.

The most frequently identified priorities relate to financing, data systems, monitoring and reporting, institutional capacity, coordination, and accountability mechanisms (Figure 2). This consistency across respondents from different institutional levels suggests that these are not isolated concerns, but rather systemic constraints affecting the effectiveness of the water sector as a whole.

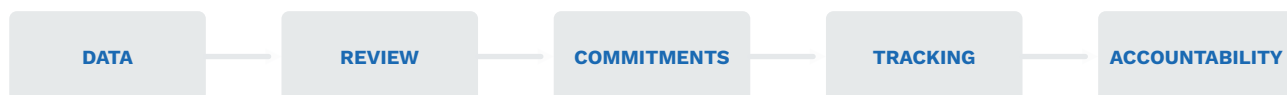


Figure 2: JSR System Failure Chain. From Weak Data to Repeated Failures

Proposed Reform Pathways for Robust JSR in Malawi

6.1 Data Systems and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

6.1.1 ESTABLISH A HARMONISED NATIONAL WASH MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

Robust data systems are foundational to sector performance. Effective WASH monitoring frameworks and integrated information systems strengthen the availability, consistency, and use of sector data for planning, accountability, and resource allocation. However, many countries continue to face fragmented monitoring arrangements that limit evidence-based decision-making (WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2023; African Water Facility, 2023). The evidence base for unified WASH MIS frameworks has grown substantially in recent years, confirming the central role of harmonised indicator sets in driving accountability and cross-institutional coherence. This recommendation should not be seen as just a technical solution. A WASH Management Information System (MIS) can only work well if the sector first agrees on a common Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework and a standard set of indicators. Without this, the MIS will continue to produce inconsistent data, no matter how much is invested in the system. In simple terms, harmonising the MEL framework comes first, and harmonising the MIS follows.

A multi-country study examining WaterAid-supported MIS initiatives in Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, Mozambique, and Uganda found that the process of harmonising indicators brought together government and non-government actors to build sector coordination and consensus. Prioritising a manageable list of indicators encouraged timeliness in data-gathering processes and built trust in data quality (Kimbugwe et al., 2022). In Papua New Guinea specifically, the adoption of SDG indicators and extended subnational planning indicators. Formalised within a national WASH monitoring and evaluation framework. Led directly to improved budgetary processes and enhanced sector coordination (Kimbugwe et al., 2022). Across these examples, countries first agreed on a common Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework and a standard set of indicators. The Management Information System (MIS) was then developed to support and manage these agreed standards. This is also true for Malawi, where the main challenge is not the lack of technology but the use of different indicators and reporting methods across the sector.

At the global level, the 2023 UN-Water consultation at Stockholm World Water Week affirmed strong sector consensus on the need to define a core set of WASH

systems indicators as a critical next step in supporting a common approach to monitoring (WHO/UNICEF, 2024). The GLAAS 2022 report. The largest WASH systems data collection to date, drawing on responses from more than 120 countries. Further highlighted that effective national monitoring systems are a distinguishing feature of countries making measurable SDG 6 progress (UN-Water, 2022). Only 45% of countries were found to be on track for drinking-water targets, and just 25% for sanitation targets, underscoring the urgency of strengthening domestic data infrastructure (UN-Water, 2022).

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a unified, interoperable WASH M&E and MIS with standardised indicators aligned to SDG 6 monitoring frameworks and national sector plans.

BENCHMARK

A nationally adopted M&E and MIS operationalised across all relevant institutions with documented indicator harmonisation.

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that sector data systems are fragmented with no operational national WASH MIS, and that 4 conflicting definitions of a functional water point undermine cross-cycle comparability (WSAU, 2025, Section 5.6.3).

6.1.2 PROMOTE DATA INTEGRATION AND INTEROPERABILITY

Interoperable data systems enhance cross-sector planning and reduce reporting burdens. The fragmentation of data across WASH, finance, health, and local government platforms remains a persistent structural barrier to evidence-based planning in many low- and middle-income countries. Siloed systems generate duplicated reporting obligations and undermine the coherence of sector reviews.

Evidence from multi-country MIS implementation experience confirms that integration between WASH monitoring systems and broader public sector data environments is a key enabler of effective subnational planning and budgetary advocacy. Where WASH ministries have successfully linked monitoring data to finance and local government systems, sub-national offices have reported increased confidence in advocating for funding with national counterparts. The WHO/UNICEF JMP and GLAAS teams have jointly called for a transition from fragmented primary data collection towards data harvested from national monitoring and review processes. A model that depends fundamentally on interoperability across institutional boundaries (WHO/UNICEF, 2024).

The UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025 explicitly identifies the proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for community participation in WASH management as a priority indicator, recognising that local-level data integration is a precondition for meaningful decentralised governance.

RECOMMENDATION

Integrate WASH M&E and MIS with finance, health, and local government data platforms through standardised application programming interfaces (APIs) and interoperability protocols.

BENCHMARK

At least two institutional systems formally interoperable with the national WASH MIS, with documented data-sharing arrangements.

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that siloed reporting platforms across WASH, finance, health, and local government platforms constrain evidence-based planning and prevent cross-institutional comparability (Section 5.2, Table 4).

6.1.3 ENABLE ANNUAL SECTOR DATA REPORTING

Reliable data reporting is essential for accountability. Weak reporting compliance undermines sector reviews globally. Despite the expansion of global monitoring mechanisms such as GLAAS, national-level data submission remains inconsistent across many countries, limiting the ability of sector reviews to serve as genuine accountability platforms.

The GLAAS 2022 report documented participation from 121 countries and 23 external support agencies. The largest GLAAS data collection to date. Yet country participation remains voluntary, and significant gaps persist in the regularity and completeness of national submissions (UN-Water, 2022). GLAAS data further revealed that fewer than one-third of countries reported having sufficient human resources to carry out key WASH functions, a systemic constraint that directly compromises data reporting capacity (UN-Water, 2022). Experience from countries that have institutionalised annual reporting. Supported by training, clear accountability lines, and performance incentives. Demonstrates that compliance can be substantially improved when reporting obligations are anchored in national policy frameworks rather than dependent solely on donor-driven cycles.

The GLAAS strategy for 2023–2030 signals a commitment to making national monitoring data the primary input for global reporting. This raises the stakes for consistent annual data submission as a prerequisite for meaningful sector review (WHO, 2023).

RECOMMENDATION

Introduce binding policies, institutional performance incentives, and capacity support to ensure annual data submission by all sector institutions.

BENCHMARK

≥90% reporting compliance across designated national reporting entities.

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that data updates are inconsistent, with limited submission of technical and financial data by stakeholders. The primary structural weakness undermining SPR analytical depth (Section 5.2).

6.2 Financing and Sustainability

6.2.1 SECURE SUSTAINABLE FINANCING FOR THE JOINT SECTOR REVIEW PROCESS

Sustainable sector coordination depends on predictable and sustainable financing arrangements. High dependence on external financing can create vulnerabilities in sector planning, reduce government ownership of priorities, and weaken the continuity of accountability mechanisms where donor commitments are not aligned with national budgeting and planning systems (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005; Wild & Foresti, 2013). Evidence from global WASH financing assessments indicates that countries with stronger domestic financing frameworks, improved budget execution, and clearer mechanisms for operation and maintenance financing are better positioned to sustain service delivery outcomes than those relying predominantly on unpredictable external assistance (WHO & World Bank, 2023).

The GLAAS 2022 report found that over 75% of countries reported insufficient funding to implement their WASH plans and strategies, and that better-performing countries tend to have effective financial strategies characterised by high levels of domestic capital utilisation and operational cost recovery (UN-Water, 2022). A collaborative analysis by Water.org, IRC WASH, and the World Bank Water Global Practice concluded that sustainable success in mobilising

finance at scale is dependent not primarily on the design of blended mechanisms, but on addressing foundational public financial management issues that determine whether any finance. Public, private, or blended can deliver durable outcomes. Without addressing these foundations, blended finance becomes a short-term solution that inadvertently perpetuates the existing cycle of dependency on external assistance rather than building self-sufficiency.

A multi-year financing framework that combines government appropriations, development partner contributions, and. Where feasible. Domestic revenue instruments provides the most durable architecture for sustaining JSR processes across electoral cycles and funding fluctuations. Such a framework should include explicit budget lines for JSR coordination functions, data collection, and stakeholder engagement.

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a blended financing model that combines government budget allocations with development partner resources, formalised within a multi-year framework that supports the full JSR cycle.

BENCHMARK

A formally approved multi-year financing framework for the JSR governance process, with documented government and partner commitments.

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that over-reliance on donor funding creates structural fragility in the JSR governance process, and that government budget lines for JSR coordination functions are absent from current financing frameworks (Section 5.7, GLAAS 2022).

6.3 Climate Integration and Sector Resilience

6.3.1 INTEGRATE CLIMATE-SENSITIVE INDICATORS INTO JSR FRAMEWORKS

Climate-resilient WASH systems require the integration of adaptation metrics into sector monitoring frameworks. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2022) concluded with high confidence that heavy rainfall events and flooding are associated with increased waterborne diseases, particularly diarrhoeal diseases including cholera, in high-, middle-, and low-income countries alike. Water insecurity and inadequate WASH increase disease risk with high confidence, underscoring the direct public health stakes of climate-resilient WASH service delivery (IPCC, 2022).

Despite this evidence, the GLAAS 2022 report found that the majority of countries have not addressed climate risks or introduced climate resiliency into WASH policies and planning (WHO, 2022). While 71% of countries reported using climate change preparedness approaches in national planning, only approximately 20% reported implementing these approaches at sufficient scale for local risk assessment and appropriate WASH management (UN-Water, 2022). Furthermore, only about one-third of countries monitor progress or allocate explicit funding to populations disproportionately affected by climate change (UN-Water, 2022).

In response, the WHO and UNICEF JMP and GLAAS teams have launched a dedicated two-year project to identify indicators for monitoring climate-resilient WASH at the global level, to support progressive integration of climate resilience information into national and global WASH monitoring frameworks. Proposed indicators include the ratio of total expenditure to total annual costs identified for WASH climate adaptation, and the proportion of populations served by water service providers that have received training in climate risk assessment and risk management. These developments provide a ready-made indicator set for integration into JSR frameworks at the national level.

The Global Water Partnership–UNICEF Strategic Framework for WASH Climate Resilient Development (2022 edition) provides an operational architecture for embedding climate resilience across four quadrants of WASH sector activity, including monitoring and evaluation. Directly applicable to JSR framework design.

RECOMMENDATION

Incorporate climate expenditure tracking, resilience indicators, and climate risk assessment tools into national JSR frameworks, drawing on the emerging JMP/GLAAS climate-resilient WASH indicator set.

BENCHMARK

Climate indicators and climate expenditure tracking reflected in sector reports, with documented alignment to national adaptation plans.

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that climate resilience is acknowledged as a narrative theme in the JSR but remains absent from core SPR indicator sets and operational metrics (Section 5.9, Table 4, AU Annex E score 1/3).

6.4 Stakeholder Engagement and Inclusivity

6.4.1 ENHANCE STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION ACROSS ALL LEVELS

Inclusive governance improves sector outcomes and sustainability (World Bank, 2017, Water Witness International, 2023, WESNet, 2024). The evidence base for participatory approaches to environmental and water governance has grown considerably, with a 2023 meta-analysis of 305 case studies confirming that stakeholder participation, when designed with appropriate intensity across representation, deliberation, and influence dimensions, produces measurable improvements in governance outputs (Newig et al., 2023). The analysis identified stakeholder representation – including the degree to which diverse groups are included – as a critical design variable determining the effectiveness of participatory processes (Newig et al., 2023).

In the water governance domain specifically, research has established that citizen participation can improve the quality and legitimacy of political decisions when institutional conditions are in place to facilitate long-term interaction among diverse stakeholders. Effective participation depends on the motivation and skills of participants, sustained engagement, supportive organisational contexts, and the development of relational trust among stakeholders (Maya Jariego, 2024)

The UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025 designates the proportion of local administrative units with established and operational procedures for participation of local communities in WASH management as a priority SDG 6.b indicator, affirming the global normative recognition of institutionalised participation as a governance standard (UNICEF, 2022). In 2021, UNICEF country offices reported over 1,792 WASH programme partners in addition to government partners, spanning UN agencies, international and national NGOs, academic institutions, civil society organisations, and private companies. Illustrating the scale of multi-stakeholder engagement that effective WASH governance requires (UNICEF, 2022).

RECOMMENDATION

Embed stakeholder participation requirements in institutional performance frameworks, ensure balanced representation across gender, civil society, private sector, and marginalised groups, and document participation systematically across all JSR cycles.

BENCHMARK

Documented evidence of participation across all designated stakeholder groups in each JSR cycle, with disaggregated records by group type.

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that district-level participation is donor-dependent and unsustainable, private sector actors are structurally excluded from TWG/SWG architecture, and community participation is indirect and under-measured (Section 5.4, Annex G. 19% district participation rating).

6.4.2 STRENGTHEN DISTRICT VOICE AND CROSS-LEARNING

Decentralised systems perform more effectively when local government institutions, communities, and other subnational actors are meaningfully engaged, have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and participate in mechanisms that promote learning, coordination, and knowledge sharing across districts and localities (UNICEF, 2020; World Bank, 2017). Evidence from water governance reforms in Ghana demonstrates that community management models grounded in participatory development principles can strengthen local ownership, improve accountability, and enhance the sustainability of rural water services when they are supported by appropriate institutional arrangements, capacity development, and continued technical oversight (Bakalian, A, 2009; World Bank, 2010). However, Ghana's experience also demonstrates that community participation alone is insufficient to sustain decentralised service delivery; effective governance requires clear mandates between national institutions, local authorities, and community structures, supported by predictable financing, reliable monitoring systems, and mechanisms for accountability and performance improvement (World Bank, 2017).

Which devolve management responsibility and foster community ownership. Can enhance system sustainability and service responsiveness, though effective performance depends critically on the institutional context and support mechanisms available to local actors.

Research on social learning in waste and water governance confirms that combining infrastructure provision with structured knowledge exchange substantially improves sustained community participation, and that the absence of formal feedback loops from sub-national levels to national planning processes weakens accountability and reduces the relevance of sector reviews. The evidence further indicates that intermediary actors. Organisations that bridge management with non-governmental stakeholders and connect local entities with national levels. Play a distinctive role in generating credibility and trust across governance tiers (Maya Jariago, 2024).

Institutionalised peer learning platforms and cross-district exchange mechanisms are particularly valuable in contexts where MIS implementation is uneven, as they enable local data officers and planners to share practical

experience with data collection, quality assurance, and interpretation. Building informal capacity that formal training alone does not provide.

Recommendation. Institutionalise district feedback loops within the JSR governance process and establish structured peer-learning platforms to enable cross-district and cross-regional exchange of evidence and implementation experience.

Benchmark. Regular cross-district exchange mechanisms operational and documented, with evidence of feedback informing national sector decisions.

Evidence Link. This recommendation responds directly to the finding that subnational feedback loops are absent from the JSR governance cycle, creating a structural disconnect between district-level service realities and national decision-making (Section 5.6.2, Kenya precedent in Section 2.5).

6.4.3 INCREASE AWARENESS AND OWNERSHIP OF THE JSR PROCESS

Low awareness reduces the effectiveness of accountability platforms.

Communication strategies are critical for stakeholder buy-in and sustained engagement (UN-Water, 2022). Where JSR governance processes are poorly understood by key actors, including district government officials, civil society representatives, and community leaders. Attendance and contribution quality decline, diminishing the value of the review as an accountability mechanism.

The GLAAS 2022 report emphasised the need for governments to drive systemic change in WASH services, including promoting political leadership and advocacy at all levels of government, as well as building capacity and promoting knowledge exchange (UN-Water, 2022). The IRC All Systems Connect Symposium process similarly highlighted that effective use of sector data for advocacy and policy influence requires not only that data are available, but that stakeholders at all levels understand how to interpret and apply them.

Evidence from multi-country WASH MIS implementation experience further demonstrates that annual training and orientation on indicators, data collection, and results interpretation. Conducted at both national and subnational levels. Substantially increases understanding of data management and use among planners and implementers, helping them to see the practical relevance of monitoring systems to their work. This experience points to the need for targeted communication strategies that are audience-specific, linking the JSR governance process to the concrete planning and funding decisions that different stakeholder groups are empowered to make.

RECOMMENDATION

Implement targeted, audience-specific communication and capacity-building strategies to increase awareness of the JSR governance process, its outputs, and the role of different stakeholder groups within it.

BENCHMARK

Documented increase in stakeholder participation rates and awareness levels across successive JSR cycles, measured through structured feedback mechanisms

EVIDENCE LINK

This recommendation responds directly to the finding that limited awareness of the JSR's purpose constrains both attendance quality and the depth of contributions, particularly at sub-national levels (Section 4.4 validation workshop findings (Chapter 4), Annex G).

6.5 Consolidated Reform Action Matrix

The following matrix consolidates all twelve reform recommendations into a single structured decision instrument. It is designed to enable the Ministry of Water and Sanitation and IWMI to assign responsibilities, sequence implementation, and track delivery against evidence-linked outputs. Recommendations are ordered by implementation phase priority.

Table 5: Consolidated Reform Action Matrix

REFORM ACTION	LEAD ACTOR	SUPPORTING ACTORS	TIMELINE	OUTPUT	EVIDENCE LINK
Establish JSR Governance Secretariat with dedicated staffing, budget, and legal mandate	MoWS Principal Secretary	Ministry of Finance, Development Partners	0–12 months	Operational Secretariat with ToR, JSR Annual Calendar adopted	5.1. JSR functions as event, not year-round system, Annex D RACI
Institutionalise JSR Undertakings Tracking System with named owners and escalation protocol	JSR Secretariat / MoWS M&E	TWGs, SWG, District Councils	0–12 months	Digital tracker operational (Annex B), <60-day resolution rate >70%	5.2.6. 14/23 undertakings lack ownership (WSAU, 2025), Annex G. 18% rating

REFORM ACTION	LEAD ACTOR	SUPPORTING ACTORS	TIMELINE	OUTPUT	EVIDENCE LINK
Realign JSR Calendar to precede MTEF budget window (Sept–Oct JSR)	MoWS Planning / MoFEA	JSR Secretariat, TWGs	0–18 months	JSR findings formally submitted as MTEF input, Annex C calendar adopted	2.4. JSR held in May, 3 months after budget window closes
Develop and enforce Mutual Accountability Compact with co-signed DP disbursement obligations	Minister of Water	Development Partners, JSR Secretariat	6–18 months	Signed MAC, Annual DP Disbursement Annex in SPR	5.7.2. DPs finance 85% of sector with no JSR accountability
Operationalise national WASH M&E and MIS with harmonised indicator definitions across all sub-sectors	MoWS M&E Unit	NWRA, Water Boards, District Councils, NSO	6–24 months	Unified MIS live, single functional water-point definition adopted	5.6.3. 4 conflicting definitions, 51% staff vacancy rate
Align SPR analytical framework to SDG 6, AU Agenda 2063, and MW2063 commitments	MoWS Planning / M&E	TWGs, WSAU, Development Partners	6–18 months	SPR cross-references all three framework levels, Annex A rubric score $\geq 18/21$	2.2. SPRs do not cross-reference continental or global frameworks
Integrate climate-resilient WASH indicators into SPR core indicator set	MoWS M&E / Climate Desk	UNICEF, IPCC-aligned CSOs, MoNRCC	12–30 months	Climate indicators in SPR, climate expenditure tracked, score +1 on AU Annex E	2.3. Climate integration absent from operational metrics, AU score 1/3

REFORM ACTION	LEAD ACTOR	SUPPORTING ACTORS	TIMELINE	OUTPUT	EVIDENCE LINK
Establish Development Partner Disbursement Annex in annual SPR	JSR Secretariat	Development Partners, MoFEA	0–12 months	Annex reconciling pledged vs. actual DP disbursements, published annually	5.7.2. DPs finance 85% of sector with no JSR accountability
Ring-fence O&M budget allocations at district level (min 20% of sector budget)	MoFEA / MoWS Planning	District Councils, Water Boards	18–36 months	O&M line-item in MTEF, recurrent allocation ≥20% verified in SPR	5.8.3. O&M covers only 40–60% of required expenditure (WSAU, 2025)
Embed district-level feedback loops and peer-learning platforms in JSR cycle	JSR Secretariat / MoWS Decentralisation	District Councils, CSOs, WES-Net	12–30 months	Quarterly district data submission operational, annual cross-district forum	5.6.4. District participation donor-dependent, Annex G. 19% participation rating
Implement audience-specific JSR communication strategy across all stakeholder tiers	MoWS Communications	JSR Secretariat, CSOs, Private Sector	6–18 months	Annual JSR dissemination materials, stakeholder awareness baseline survey	5.6.2 & 5.6.4. Limited awareness, especially sub-national
Introduce conditional fiscal transfers to districts tied to WASH data submission compliance	MoFEA / MoWS	District Councils, JSR Secretariat	24–48 months	Compliance-linked transfer formula in MTEF, district reporting rate ≥90%	5.7.1. District transfers stagnant at 1% vs. 5% target, Kenya precedent

Source: Derived from assessment findings in Chapter 5 and reform pathways in Chapter 6.

Timeline phases. Phase I = 0–18 months, Phase II = 18–36 months, Phase III = 36–60 months. All recommendations maintain original narrative in preceding sections.

Conclusion: The JSR as a foundation for Water Resilience

7.1 Summary of Assessment Findings

The updated assessment confirms that Malawi's Joint Sector Review system is already functioning as an established platform for sector dialogue, coordination, and stakeholder engagement. The presence of recurring review processes, broad stakeholder participation, and a recognised role for evidence in informing discussions demonstrates that the foundations of a functional system are in place.

At the same time, the evidence clearly shows that the system remains only partially institutionalised. Its most significant weaknesses lie not in the absence of structures, but in the limited effectiveness of the institutional mechanisms required to convert review processes into sustained action. In particular, weaknesses in commitment tracking, enforcement of undertakings, coordination capacity, data system integration, and financing constrain the ability of the JSR to drive accountability and performance improvement across the sector.

The findings therefore point to a clear direction for reform. Strengthening the JSR system does not require replacing existing structures, but rather reinforcing them. By improving the institutional architecture that supports coordination, enhancing the quality and integration of sector data systems, ensuring consistent tracking of commitments, and aligning review findings with financing and planning processes, the JSR can evolve into a more effective instrument for sector governance. A well-functioning JSR is Malawi's most important institutional asset for translating climate commitments into water security outcomes for the people who need them most.

7.2 The Structural Nature of the Governance Gap

Three interrelated constraints define this gap. They operate as a reinforcing causal chain rather than as independent problems. The assessment found that an event-based JSR without continuous tracking mechanisms cannot sustain accountability between review cycles. Weak tracking limits the availability of shared evidence, fragmented evidence weakens the basis for collective commitments, and inadequate monitoring of partner financing reduces the ability to enforce accountability and corrective action. These findings are consistent with broader evidence that effective sector governance requires continuous monitoring, inclusive accountability arrangements, and mechanisms

for translating commitments into measurable actions (Danert et al., 2016; Wild & Foresti, 2013; Sanitation and Water for All [SWA], 2022). Reform that targets only one constraint without addressing the wider accountability ecosystem is unlikely to transform the JSR into a functioning governance system..

Second, data systems remain fragmented and unevenly institutionalised, constraining the JSR's ability to function as a credible evidence platform. Across many African countries, water and sanitation sector monitoring systems continue to face challenges related to fragmented reporting arrangements, inconsistent indicator definitions, limited coordination, and weak interoperability between information platforms (African Ministers' Council on Water [AMCOW], 2021; WHO & UNICEF, 2024). In Malawi, similar challenges have affected the availability, timeliness, and validation of sector performance information, with district-level reporting capacity constraints contributing to incomplete and delayed datasets used during sector review processes (Ministry of Water and Sanitation, 2025). Under these conditions, the JSR is required to deliberate on evidence whose completeness, consistency, and reliability require further strengthening. Third, the accountability framework remains incomplete, particularly with respect to sector financing. Development partners finance a substantial share of WASH investments, yet their disbursements are not systematically captured within the JSR process. The absence of structured financial reporting mechanisms weakens transparency and creates an imbalance in accountability, where key resource flows are not fully subject to sector review (Holvoet & Inberg, 2009).

It is important to note that some of these constraints reflect broader public sector capacity limitations rather than weaknesses specific to the JSR itself. Insufficient staffing, constrained subnational budgets, and competing institutional priorities are systemic features of low-income governance environments, and appear to shape JSR performance in ways that no reform of the review process alone can fully address. Acknowledging this boundary condition does not diminish the reform imperative, it clarifies where JSR-specific interventions must be complemented by broader public sector strengthening.

7.3 Implications for Sector Performance and Sustainability

The governance constraints identified here have direct and observable implications for sector performance. Despite continued investment in infrastructure, progress toward universal and sustainable access remains uneven. In some instances, gains in coverage have been offset by declining functionality of existing systems.

This reflects a deeper structural dynamic, the expansion of infrastructure is not being matched by the systems required to sustain it.

The analysis points to a persistent shortfall in operations and maintenance (O&M) financing, with current allocations covering only part of lifecycle requirements. In the absence of mechanisms to track O&M expenditure, enforce maintenance responsibilities, and align financing with long-term service delivery needs, infrastructure investments risk diminishing returns over time. The result is an infrastructure–sustainability paradox. Asset growth alongside declining service reliability.

At the same time, the misalignment between the JSR calendar and national planning and budgeting cycles limits the practical influence of sector evidence. When review findings are generated after key allocation decisions have already been made, their ability to shape outcomes is constrained. In this configuration, the JSR functions more as a retrospective exercise than as a forward-looking decision-support tool.

Improving sector performance will therefore depend not only on the volume of investment, but on the strength of the governance systems that connect evidence, accountability, and financing decisions.

7.4 Reform Imperative. From Review Process to Governance System

The findings of this assessment point to a clear and necessary transition, from an event-based review process to a system-based governance mechanism.

This transition requires strengthening the institutional foundations that sustain accountability, coordination, and evidence use throughout the year. The recommendations advanced in this report are therefore best understood as components of a coherent system redesign rather than as isolated interventions.

Three priorities stand out and these are;

The first is the institutionalisation of a JSR Secretariat with a clear mandate, dedicated capacity, and responsibility for year-round coordination. Central to this is the establishment of a structured undertakings tracking system, enabling commitments to be recorded, assigned, and monitored over time.

The second is the realignment of the JSR calendar to ensure that sector performance evidence feeds directly into national planning and budgeting processes. Aligning the review cycle with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework would strengthen the link between performance assessment and resource allocation.

The third is the integration of financing accountability systems, including systematic reporting of development partner disbursements. Introducing a structured financing annex would improve transparency and allow for more comprehensive oversight of sector resource flows.

These reforms are interdependent. Institutional capacity enables coordination, data systems enable accountability, and calendar alignment enables influence. Progress in one area, without corresponding advances in others, is unlikely to produce sustained change. What is required is a coordinated shift toward a fully institutionalised governance system.

7.5 Contribution to Knowledge and Broader Relevance

This assessment contributes to the wider literature on sector governance and mutual accountability in several respects.

First, it reinforces the distinction between institutional presence and functional performance. The existence of formal structures does not guarantee effective governance, what matters is whether those structures are supported by enforceable systems and aligned incentives.

Second, it highlights that the effectiveness of Joint Sector Reviews depends less on their frequency than on the strength of the systems operating between review cycles. Institutionalised follow-up mechanisms, including tracking of agreed undertakings, monitoring of commitments, and routine reporting, are what sustain accountability beyond the review event itself. This aligns with evidence that effective JSRs function as continuous accountability processes rather than isolated meetings (Danert et al., 2016; Sanitation and Water for All [SWA], 2022; Wild & Foresti, 2013).

Finally, the study draws attention to the importance of inclusive accountability architectures. Where key actors, particularly major financiers, are not fully integrated into review processes, the credibility and effectiveness of mutual oversight mechanisms are diminished. Effective sector accountability requires that all stakeholders with significant influence over sector performance participate in transparent review processes, report against agreed commitments, and contribute to corrective actions (Danert et al., 2016; OECD, 2005; Sanitation and Water for All [SWA], 2022).

These insights extend beyond Malawi and are relevant to other countries seeking to strengthen sector governance in similarly complex and resource-constrained environments.

7.6 Final Reflection

The reform agenda that emerges from the combined evidence does not call for the creation of entirely new systems. Instead, it emphasises the need to strengthen existing structures so that they function more effectively and consistently. In particular, improvements are required in the tracking and enforcement of commitments, the integration and harmonisation of sector data systems, the

resourcing and institutionalisation of coordination functions, and the alignment of JSR findings with planning and budgeting processes. Strengthening these areas will enable the JSR to evolve from a platform for dialogue into a more effective mechanism for accountability, performance management, and sector transformation.

At present, the system sits at an intermediate stage. Structurally present, but not yet fully functional. The persistence of weak follow-up, fragmented data, and partial accountability demonstrates that incremental adjustments will not be sufficient.

Realising this transition will require sustained institutional commitment and careful sequencing of reforms. However, the foundations are already in place. With targeted strengthening, the JSR can evolve into a mechanism that not only reviews sector performance, but actively shapes it.

In that sense, the question is no longer whether the JSR is necessary. It is whether it can be enabled to function as intended and, in doing so, to shift the sector from cyclical review toward sustained performance improvement.

Beyond Malawi, the findings of this assessment contribute to a broader understanding of why Joint Sector Reviews in aid-dependent contexts fail to translate commitments into results. and what minimum institutional conditions are required to reverse that pattern.

This distinction matters directly for the JTWS programme and the Water Resilience Tracker. Strengthening the Joint Sector Review's institutional and data architecture is the mechanism through which the WRT Theory of Change expects strengthened JSR-related multi-stakeholder platforms to translate into more inclusive, funded, evidence-based multi-sector reporting and planning for climate-resilient water security. Malawi's water-related NDC 3.0 and National Adaptation Plan commitments are now largely in place; what remains is the governance capacity to implement, monitor, and report on them credibly. The reforms proposed in this report are therefore not incidental to that agenda – they are a precondition for it.

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Annex A. SPR Quality and Decision-Usefulness Rubric

PURPOSE

Annual assessment of SPR quality to ensure SPRs are decision-ready for JSR plenary. Adapted from Danert et al. (2016) and WSAU (2025).

SCORING SCALE

0 = Absent | 1 = Weak | 2 = Adequate | 3 = Strong. Minimum Acceptable Score. 18/21 (75%). Use at TWG validation stage (see Annex C for calendar timing).

SECTION	CRITERION	SCORE (0–3)	NOTES / EVIDENCE
A1. Strategic Alignment	SPR indicators mapped to Strategic Plan results chain		
	Subsector coverage consistent with strategy		
	Financing analysis linked to strategic targets		
A2. Indicator Clarity	Core indicators have harmonised definitions		
	Numerators/denominators documented		
	Indicator set consistent with prior cycle		
A3. Analytical Depth	Multi-year trend data presented		
	District variance analysis included		
	Bottleneck analysis structured		
A4. Equity & LNOB	Disaggregation by gender		
	Poverty/vulnerability dimension present		
A5. Climate Resilience	Climate risk indicators included (AMCOW & AU, 2026)		
	Climate-adaptive investment tracked		
A6. Financing	Total sector financing mapped by source		
	Execution vs. allocation reported		
	Development partner disbursements included (OECD, 2005)		
A7. Decision-Usefulness	Priority decisions section included		
	Responsible actors identified		
	Undertakings from prior cycle reviewed		

Annex B. JSR Undertakings Tracker Template

PURPOSE

Rolling commitment tracking instrument for use by the JSR Secretariat. All JSR undertakings should be entered at the point of agreement and reviewed at monthly Secretariat check-ins, quarterly SWG reviews, and the annual JSR plenary.

STATUS CODES

Green = On track | Yellow = Behind schedule (0–30 days) | Red = Significantly delayed (30+ days) | Complete | Dropped (with rationale)

ESCALATION PROTOCOL

30 days overdue → SWG review | 60 days overdue → Principal Secretary | 90 days overdue → Formally recorded as failed commitment at next JSR plenary

#	UNDERTAKING	LEAD ACTOR	NAMED RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE	STATUS	EVIDENCE	ESCALATION LEVEL
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Annex C. Proposed JSR Annual Calendar

PURPOSE

Benchmark calendar for repositioning the JSR as a year-round governance cycle aligned with the national MTEF budget preparation window.

MONTH / PERIOD	ACTIVITY, LEAD ACTOR, AND MILESTONE
January–February	District Data Collection and Submission. Lead. District Councils / MoWS. Milestone. Standardised district data packets submitted to national WASH MIS using harmonised indicator definitions (Annex A, WSAU, 2025).
March–April	SPR Data Compilation and Drafting. Lead. MoWS M&E Unit / Sector Departments. Milestone. Draft SPR Version 1 complete. Financing dashboard (capital vs. recurrent, O&M proxy, DP disbursements) integrated (UNICEF, 2024, OECD, 2005).
May–June	TWG Analytical Review of Draft SPR. Lead. Technical Working Groups. Milestone. TWG validation notes issued against SPR quality rubric (Annex A). Data queries resolved before SWG stage (Danert et al., 2016).
July	SWG Review and SPR Finalisation. Lead. Sector Working Group / MoWS Planning. Milestone. Final SPR circulated to all stakeholders. Priority decisions required summary section completed.
August	Pre-JSR Partner Briefing and Agenda Setting. Lead. JSR Secretariat / SWG. Milestone. JSR agenda agreed, DP Disbursement Annex draft circulated to development partners for verification (OECD, 2005).
September–October	Annual JSR Workshop. Lead. Minister / MoWS Principal Secretary. Milestone. Undertakings Matrix finalised with named responsible persons, deadlines, and escalation triggers (Annex B). AU Alignment Scorecard reviewed (Annex E, AMCOW & AU, 2026).
October–November	JSR undertakings and financing gap analysis formally submitted as MTEF inputs, consistent with broader evidence-based approaches that promote alignment between sector analysis, investment priorities, and medium-term expenditure planning
November–December	Undertakings Tracking Initiated, Q1 Review Scheduled. Lead. JSR Secretariat / SWG. Milestone. Undertakings Tracker (Annex B) active, Q1 review date confirmed (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

Annex D. Governance RACI Map

PURPOSE

Formal assignment of accountability, responsibility, consultation, and information roles across JSR governance process stages.

KEY

R = Responsible | A = Accountable | C = Consulted | I = Informed

SOURCE

Adapted from WSAU (2025) and Danert et al. (2016).

JSR FUNCTION	MOWS PLANNING	MOWS M&E	TWGS	SWG	COUNCILS / UTILITIES	CSOS	DPS
SPR preparation	A	R	C	C	R	I	I
Indicator harmonisation	A	R	R	C	C	I	C
TWG analytical review	I	C	R	A	I	C	C
JSR agenda setting	A	C	R	R	I	C	C
JSR facilitation	R	C	I	A	I	I	I
Undertakings drafting	A	C	R	R	C	C	C
Undertakings tracking	A	R	C	R	I	I	I
Escalation decisions	A	C	I	R	I	I	I
Budget linkage	R	C	I	A	I	I	C
Documentation	C	R	I	C	I	I	I

Annex E. AU Water Accountability Alignment Scorecard

PURPOSE

Structured assessment of the degree to which Malawi's Water JSR meets AUC water sector accountability principles (AMCOW & AU, 2026).

SCORING SCALE

0 = Absent | 1 = Weak | 2 = Partial | 3 = Meets Standard. Minimum Acceptable Score. 10/15 (67%).
Current Score. 4/15 (27%).

AUC PRINCIPLE	CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF MALAWI JSR SYSTEM	SCORE / KEY GAP / REFORM PRIORITY
1. Measurable Commitment Anchoring	JSR undertakings partially address operational targets. No cross-walk to SDG 6, AU Agenda 2063, or national policy milestones exists (WSAU, 2025, MoWS, 2025).	Score. 1/3. Gap. No integrated commitment register, no SDG 6 cross-walk. Priority. HIGH
2. Financial Commitment Tracking	Government budget allocation is reported descriptively. Development partner financial commitments (85% of financing) are not tracked through JSR (MoWS, 2025, UNICEF, 2024).	Score. 0/3. Gap. No partner financing report, no commitment register. Priority. HIGH
3. Investment–Performance Linkage	Coverage decline despite infrastructure investment is reported but not diagnosed through O&M or investment efficiency analysis (WSAU, 2025, Murray et al., 2024).	Score. 1/3. Gap. No financing adequacy analysis, no O&M expenditure tracking. Priority. HIGH
4. Climate Resilience Integration	2025 JSR framed around climate (Cyclone Freddy response). Climate resilience not yet in core SPR indicator set (MoWS, 2025).	Score. 1/3. Gap. No climate indicators in SPR core set, no climate financing tracking. Priority. MEDIUM
5. Structured Shared accountability	JSR has formal structure. Co-chairing by UNICEF creates authority ambiguity . No Mutual Accountability Compact. Undertakings not enforced with escalation (WSAU, 2025).	Score. 1/3. Gap. No MAC, governance ambiguity, no escalation mechanism. Priority. HIGH
OVERALL SCORE	Malawi's Water JSR does not currently meet the minimum acceptable score threshold. Priority reforms are required across all five dimensions (AMCOW & AU, 2026).	Current. 4/15 (27%). Minimum. 10/15 (67%). Status. URGENT

Annex F. IWMI JSR Assessment Survey Instrument

PURPOSE

This annex reproduces the IWMI JSR Assessment Survey instrument as administered during Phase II data collection (Section 4.3). The instrument comprised two components administered sequentially within each respondent session. A qualitative semi-structured component (Section 2 open-ended questions) administered to the 126 purposively selected key informants, and a quantitative structured rating component (Section 1 closed questions) administered to all 126 survey respondents. Both components were part of the same integrated data collection phase, they are described separately in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 for analytical clarity. Responses from the quantitative component informed the aggregate findings presented in Table 4 and the disaggregated analysis in Annex G. Qualitative responses were thematically coded and are integrated into the findings presented throughout Chapter 5.

SCORING SCALE

1 = Very Weak | 2 = Weak | 3 = Moderate | 4 = Strong | 5 = Very Strong

ADMINISTRATION

Both components of the survey were administered within a single respondent session. All responses were anonymised, no individual-level data are publicly available. Aggregated quantitative findings only are reported in this document, qualitative responses are integrated thematically into Chapter 5.

Section 1. Quantitative Ratings (Closed Questions)

#	DIMENSION	SURVEY QUESTION	SCALE
1	Overall JSR Effectiveness	How would you rate the overall effectiveness of Malawi's Water Joint Sector Review as a governance tool for improving sector performance?	1–5
2	JSR Process Quality	How would you rate the quality of the JSR governance process, including preparation, facilitation, and follow-up?	1–5
3	Analytical Depth of the SPR	How would you rate the analytical depth and decision-usefulness of the Sector Performance Report presented at the JSR?	1–5
4	Indicator Harmonisation	How would you rate the consistency and harmonisation of performance indicators used across sector reporting systems?	1–5
5	Undertakings Follow-Up	How would you rate the effectiveness of the system for tracking and enforcing JSR undertakings between annual review cycles?	1–5
6	Development Partner Accountability	How would you rate the degree to which development partners are held accountable for their disbursement commitments within the JSR framework?	1–5
7	Calendar and Budget Alignment	How would you rate the alignment between the JSR cycle and the national MTEF budget preparation process?	1–5
8	District and Community Participation	How would you rate the quality and depth of district-level and community participation in the JSR governance process?	1–5
9	Climate Resilience Integration	How would you rate the degree to which climate resilience is integrated as an operational variable, not merely a narrative theme. within the JSR framework?	1–5
10	Private Sector Engagement	How would you rate the effectiveness of mechanisms for private sector engagement within the JSR governance architecture?	1–5

Section 2. Open-Ended Questions

Respondents were invited to respond in writing to the following open-ended questions. Responses were thematically coded and integrated into the qualitative findings presented in Chapter 5.

Q#	OPEN-ENDED QUESTION
1	What do you consider the single most important structural weakness of the current Water JSR governance system?
2	What one reform would most significantly improve the JSR's accountability function?
3	What barriers, if any, prevent meaningful district-level participation in the JSR?
4	How effectively does the JSR incorporate the perspectives and data of development partners, NGOs, and the private sector?
5	Are there aspects of the JSR governance process, including its timing, format, or outputs, that you believe undermine its usefulness as a governance tool? Please describe.

Section 3. Respondent Classification

Respondents were classified into one of six institutional categories at the point of survey administration. Categories were: (1) Senior MoWS technical staff, (2) Development partner programme officers, (3) Civil society representatives, (4) District council officials, (5) Water Board and basin-level respondents, (6) Independent sector analysts. Classification was used for disaggregated analysis only (Annex G) and does not appear in any individually identifiable form.

Annex G. IWMI JSR Assessment Survey. Disaggregated Results by Institutional Category

PURPOSE

Disaggregated survey results by institutional category for the IWMI JSR Assessment Survey. Results are presented to document divergences and convergences across the six institutional categories surveyed. All figures represent the percentage of respondents rating the dimension as 'Strong' or 'Very Strong.' Anonymised individual-level data are held by IWMI.

Disaggregated Survey Results by Institutional Category (% Rating Strong or Very Strong)

GOVERNANCE DIMENSION	MOWS STAFF (N=8)	DPS (N=10)	CSOS (N=7)	DISTRICTS (N=8)	WATER BOARDS (N=9)	ANALYSTS (N=8)	AGGREGATE
Overall JSR Effectiveness	60%	50%	43%	50%	56%	50%	53%
JSR Process Quality	55%	45%	40%	50%	50%	40%	47%
Data System Adequacy	30%	25%	29%	25%	22%	35%	28%
Undertakings Follow-Up	20%	17%	14%	13%	22%	19%	18%
Development Partner Accountability	25%	17%	22%	25%	22%	20%	22%
Calendar and Budget Alignment	22%	22%	29%	25%	22%	25%	24%
District and Community Participation	20%	17%	20%	25%	17%	15%	19%

G.1 OVERALL JSR EFFECTIVENESS

Aggregate. 53% rated Strong or Very Strong. The divergence between MoWS technical staff (highest, 60%) and civil society (lowest, 43%) is consistent with a pattern in which national-level actors perceive the JSR's coordinating function more positively than frontline actors who experience its downstream implementation gaps most directly.

G.2 UNDERTAKINGS FOLLOW-UP (STRONGEST CONSENSUS FINDING)

Aggregate. 18% rated Strong or Very Strong. This is the strongest consensus finding across all six institutional categories. The near-uniform low rating, including from MoWS technical staff who are the primary custodians of the undertakings process, constitutes cross-institutional self-diagnosis of a structural failure. This finding justifies the VERY HIGH confidence designation assigned to the undertakings enforcement weakness in the Robustness Scorecard (Section 5.9).

G.3 DEVELOPMENT PARTNER ACCOUNTABILITY, DATA SYSTEM ADEQUACY, AND CALENDAR ALIGNMENT

Development Partner Accountability. Aggregate 22%. The notably low self-rating from development partner respondents (17%) indicates that development partner programme officers themselves do not consider current JSR accountability arrangements for partner financing to be adequate, reinforcing the reform priority for a DP Disbursement Annex (Section 6.2).

Data System Adequacy. Aggregate 28%. Water Board and basin-level respondents record the lowest rating (22%), consistent with their specific identification of incompatibility between water board data platforms and national WASH MIS frameworks.

Calendar and Budget Alignment. Aggregate 24%. District council officials (25%) and civil society respondents (29%) record slightly higher ratings than national-level actors, consistent with the finding that districts experience the timing misalignment most acutely and have developed informal workarounds.

G.4 INTERPRETIVE NOTE ON DIVERGENCES

Key divergences identified in the disaggregated data are discussed in Section 5.9. The most analytically important divergence is the gap between MoWS technical staff and civil society on overall JSR effectiveness (60% vs. 43%), which is consistent with principal-agent theory's prediction that principals who own the governance mechanism will perceive it more favourably than agents who experience its enforcement gaps directly. The convergence across all categories on undertakings follow-up weakness is the diagnostic finding with the strongest evidentiary standing in this assessment, and is the primary empirical foundation for the Phase I accountability institutionalisation priority in the Reform Action Matrix (Section 6.2).