



More for some, none for others

DISCUSSION PAPER



WaterAid/Jon Spaul

A fifth of humanity has been left behind by development efforts and continue to scavenge for potable water; water of extremely dubious quality, often contaminated with faeces. And if you are a woman without adequate sanitation, you are forced to be a prisoner of daylight.

Poor people's lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation is one of the most enduring violations of human rights that governments throughout the world continue to tolerate. Worse, it is one that the national and international decision-makers perpetuate:

- By failing to direct investment in the water sector to the poorer sections of society in both urban and rural areas, and failing to monitor the social and distributional impact of the investments that are made

- By failing to recognise the importance of sustainability of water and sanitation services, and failing to provide leadership for long-term solutions rather than short term, albeit populist, quick-fixes
- By failing to make decision-making over water and sanitation services, its financing and planning open, and its performance monitoring stronger and accessible to public scrutiny

What an indictment it will be when the new decade for drinking water and sanitation starts in 2005 without fundamental reforms of the water and sanitation sector in the majority of countries. What the sector doesn't fix, no poverty plan, no Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, no Millennium Development Goal can deliver.

Where should the national and international decision-makers focus resources to right these enduring wrongs? Based on its practical programme experience and research WaterAid suggests the following priorities:

- *Strengthen performance monitoring*
- *Build coherent donor support to government*
- *Strengthen public scrutiny and participation*

Financing against the poor

External donor finance accounts for a large slice of available funds to the water and sanitation sector in many sub-Saharan countries. WaterAid's research in Malawi¹ shows that up to 75% of water points were provided outside of the Ministry of Water Development's budget. In Zambia² up to 80% of water development funds come from external assistance.

WaterAid's first concern is why national governments do not allocate more of their own revenues to water supply and sanitation development. Debt servicing no doubt limits government resources that can be allocated toward basic services. However, in countries that are highly indebted, eligible for debt relief, and now make Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, water and sanitation have not been identified as priorities, despite participatory poverty assessments consistently placing these basic services in the top three priorities of poor people.^{3,4}

Even where funds are allocated to the water supply and sanitation sector in national accounts, these are decreasing: in Malawi, for example, the water sector received 37% less in the 2003/04 budget compared to 2001/02 (a decrease from 1.4% of GDP (01/02) to 0.87% of GDP).⁵ In Tanzania, actual expenditure on water supply and sanitation in the past three years has been lower than projected. The only exception to the general rule is Uganda, which prioritised water and sanitation not only in the use of its debt relief monies, but also its national revenues.

WaterAid's second concern is the built-in inequity within these spending patterns. In Malawi,⁶ calculations based on water point densities and GPS mapping show that on the basis of current spending it will take the government 32 years to provide basic water services to the poorest areas in the Salima

district. Using the same methodology in Uganda,⁷ research shows that certain areas continue to benefit from investment in new water points year after year, while neighbouring areas are persistently neglected. The level of inequality in distribution between sub-districts is increasing rather than decreasing.

In Nepal,⁸ WaterAid's research shows that more than 60% of investments in water supply and sanitation will go to provide services to 6% of the country's population who live in Kathmandu valley. Much of this investment will pay for the massive Melamchi Tunnel that many technical studies showed was unnecessary, but that bilateral donors and the Asian Development Bank continued to support.

In Tanzania, donors fund water supply schemes that serve the better-off and are least accessed by the poorest 20% of the population. And because these schemes use technologies that are at least 10 times more expensive to build and rehabilitate than low-cost ones, for every additional person connected to a piped water scheme, 10 households are denied access to a protected water source.

On-budget but off-plan

The insistence of external donors – bilateral, multilateral and non governmental organisations (NGOs) – to negotiate separate initiatives with governments, often outside the planning process, is a major cause for governments' inability to control and account for the external assistance they receive for water supply and sanitation. For example, in Tanzania,⁹ this causes the fragmentation of national budgets into line items making it difficult for the line ministry to prioritise sector spending in view of poverty reduction objectives. In Malawi, the existence of multiple projects with different objectives and planning horizons makes it very difficult to develop a coherent sector-wide programme. This weakens the Ministry of Water and Development's ability for planning and implementation, and paradoxically, discourages donors from engaging in programmatic support. This vicious cycle is difficult to break.

Not built to last

The first International Decade of Drinking Water achieved much in terms of providing access to water and sanitation for millions of people worldwide. But part of the decade's legacy is the millions of handpumps that lie broken and dry, littering the rural landscape of developing countries.

The sustainability of water supply schemes continues to elude ministries of water development in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, this is because the institutions created to assure sustainability – the water user associations – are created and then left to their own devices. What other public service exists where the responsibility of management is left in the hands of newly-created,



WaterAid/Caroline Penn

voluntary groups of individuals, unaided, unregulated and unmonitored by governments? Governments have used the pretext of so-called community driven development to wash their hands clean and wish away the problems of sustaining water supply services particularly in poor rural areas.

WaterAid's research in Malawi, using a diagnostic tool called the Sustainability Snapshot, provides evidence that there is inconsistent formation, training, support and development of water user 'committees'. In many countries, the legal identity of these committees is unclear and the parameters of their responsibilities are often imprecise, as are the boundaries of their relationship with district water authorities. In many instances, due to these unresolved ambiguities, these water committees descend into unaccountable entities incapable of delivering basic services at a reasonable standard for community members to expect.

The question that must be asked of governments and donors is why support for community-based 'service providers' is not included in plans, strategies and national budgets in the same way that assistance to private providers is. Also, allocations to water supply and sanitation are predominantly for physical infrastructure (eg boreholes in the Malawi case) and it is not readily apparent where provision is made for 'soft' expenditure such as support to community management structures that are important to ensuring sustainability.

When sustainability of water services is compromised, invariably, it is the poor who suffer the worst consequences.

Avoiding accountability

All of the above paints a picture of a sector where accountability is in low supply. There are reasons for this. Despite national policies on decentralisation, district and provincial officials still have little or no decision-making power on the allocation and disbursement of financial resources, as well as the implementation of water supply projects. For example, in Malawi, the district governments in Machinga and Salima have not received any water supply allocations from the Ministry of Water Development for either 2002/03 or 2003/04 financial years. In Zambia, research shows that District-level Water, Sanitation and Health Education Committees (D-WASHES), established in 1996 to ensure community planning and management of water supply and sanitation facilities, have not been the



drivers of local level planning that they should be.

While some flow of information between political, administrative and interdepartmental structures is evident in Uganda, emphasis is put on vertical accountability to central government. Information is not used effectively for managerial decisions at the district level. There is also limited coordination and information sharing between the district water office, extension workers and other stakeholders such as district-based NGOs providing water supply and sanitation services.

It is not just governments at fault, in Malawi NGOs and donors fail to inform district water authorities of their project plans, their operational policies and guidelines, and their target areas, making coordination among different service providers difficult. In Zambia where donors provide up to 80% of water development financing, the Ministry of Finance is unable to account for this money because donors do not report their disbursements to the government. This means that even if there was central accounting of all allocations, there is no central accounting of all disbursements, making public scrutiny difficult.

How can the situation be improved?

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals will require vastly improved performance from the sector in three key areas: performance monitoring to ensure that investment is focused on equity and sustainability; donor coherence and positive support to national budgeting and planning; and

“We don’t even know the water projects approved for our district. Sometimes, we learn about projects only when we hear the rigs starting to dig the boreholes.”

District Administrator, Zambia

significant increases in transparency and accountability by governments, donors and other sector actors.

And there is evidence that improved performance is possible. The achievements of the water supply and sanitation sector in Uganda provide a model for change.

Strengthening performance monitoring

The Uganda sector Performance Measurement Framework has recently been agreed. In it, governments, donors, NGOs and the private sector agreed a set of performance indicators that will be the focus of assessments over the years. Among the '10 golden indicators' prioritised is the equity of distribution of water points to ensure that the poorest areas are not being disadvantaged by investment decisions and patterns. Having this data enables district governments to plan future water and sanitation investments with better evidence. It therefore helps to protect these investment decisions from unnecessary political interference or political capture. This requires a strengthening of the capabilities and mechanisms of district and central governments for monitoring and evaluation. An annual Joint Sector Review between government, donors and other stakeholders is a key plank of this capacity-building.

References

All WaterAid research referred to in this report is available on WaterAid's website www.wateraid.org/prsp

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Coherent donor support to government

The Ugandan water and sanitation sector has produced its Sector Investment Plan for the next 15 years, on the basis of targets agreed within the country's national water strategy and poverty plan. The sector investment plan's implementation is now assisted by donor financing. Government, not donors, is firmly in the driving seat for directing investments in the sector.

Strong public scrutiny and participation

Water and sanitation were prioritised within Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) partly due to the persistent lobbying of civil society groups advocating the priorities of the poor, captured in the participatory poverty assessment. The role of civil society groups in continuing to scrutinise and participate in the sector's reviews and planning processes continues. Financial and political support for this comes not just from external donors, but also from central government itself which ensures that civil society representatives understand and contribute to the processes.

While there are other problems besetting the sector in Uganda government has taken many necessary steps to address some of the fundamental sector weaknesses and there are lessons here for other governments and donors to learn.



WaterAid – water for life

An international NGO dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe domestic water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world's poorest people.

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