

# WaterAid's submission to the International Development Select Committee

## Executive summary

### The crisis

The global crisis in water and sanitation is not driven by water scarcity. It is fundamentally a crisis driven by inequality and poverty. It is a crisis that is killing as many as 6,000 children a day – this is the equivalent of 20 jumbo jets filled with children lost everyday to an entirely preventable public health crisis. The WHO estimates that as much as ninety percent of the fatalities attributable to water related diseases are children. But as well as a crisis that impacts on the most vulnerable members of communities in the developing world, it is a crisis where the burden falls most heavily on women. It is girl children that are denied an education because they are tasked with hours of water fetching labour. It is girl children that frequently drop out of school when they reach menstrual age because of inadequate sanitation facilities. When they grow up, women's livelihoods are constrained by water fetching labour – in some instances for several hours a day. And it is women that look after the children that are ill and dying from diarrhoeal disease. 1.2 billion of our fellow humans face and struggle with this crisis every day.

### Prioritised by the poor but neglected by governments and donors

Given the immediacy and scale of impact of the water and sanitation crisis, it is no surprise that the poor almost always put access to water and sanitation services within the top three, if not their first, priority. It should be a cause for alarm that the donor community and recipient governments alike do not respond with anything like the same concern. The data from UN agencies and from WaterAid's own analysis in 16 aid recipient countries shows that spending on the sector is stagnant in terms of the absolute volume of expenditure, but also that it is actually falling in terms of the relative increases in aid spending and particularly in relation to the finance available spending on health and education.

There are many plausible explanations for the marginalisation of the sector by donors and recipient governments. One of these is that the sector is more complex than health and education and is more vulnerable to failure as a result of interruptions in finance and policy implementation. It is also possible that because the impact of a lack of access to water and adequate sanitation falls mostly on women and that because the influence of poorer women on policy-making processes is so marginal that their priorities

rarely are reflected in policy priorities. Government responsiveness is further hampered by the chaotic nature of the sector – multiple actors, poor coordination and weak government capacity. But whatever the drivers for the sector's continuing marginalisation, the key to reversing this is generating the necessary political will behind the sector.

The UK's House of Commons International Development Select Committee Inquiry on water and sanitation is an opportune moment to take stock of the UK Government's policy approach to the sector and to assess and promote the policy paths and leadership necessary to turn around the parlous condition of this vital development area.

The bulk of WaterAid's submission is addressed at the most pressing issues in the sector as it affects, principally Low-Income Countries. This Executive Summary draws out only a few of the key recommendations contained in the following sections. Most of these highlighted in this section are those recommendations aimed at the IDSC's principal interlocutor – DFID. But this submission recognises that

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this is a multi-dimensional sector and that all stakeholders at international, national and local levels have a role to play in turning around an overshadowed sector that is of central importance to the world's poor.

## How DFID could make a difference

DFID is due to set out its new policy framework for the sector in its new Target Strategy Paper. This is a welcome opportunity to rethink the interface between the aid system and the water and sanitation sector.

In a sector that is characterised by a chaotic range of international agencies (the UN has 23 agencies claiming a mandate on water and sanitation but there is no agency within the international system with single responsibility for producing annual reports and holding governments to account) there is an urgent need for coherence, focus, authority and accountability. WaterAid believes that the international system urgently needs a single cohering framework that confers responsibilities and duties on the range of donors. We recommend that:

**The UK government calls for a single authoritative focal point within the international aid system that would monitor country level and global progress in delivering the water and sanitation MDGs, or universal coverage. DFID should be promoting a Global Action Plan that promotes a 3 Ones framework for coordinating donors, recipient governments and domestic stakeholders in recipient countries.**

**The 3 Ones framework is comprised of: One Country Plan that establishes the targets, costs and financing sources; One Coordinating Body that includes sector practitioners, recipient government officials and domestic stakeholders that can be held to account for the design, coordination and implementation of the Plan; and, One Monitoring and Evaluation that will diagnose bottlenecks and promote remedial actions.**

WaterAid believes that the incentive for aid recipient countries to produce and operationalise a 3 Ones framework would be the promise of donors to fulfil the principle behind their commitment made at the 2002 Kananaskis G8 Summit that:

***No country plan should fail to achieve the MDGs through lack of finance***

## The principles for turning around the sector

The policy actions required for turning around the sector are multiple and need the engagement of a multiplicity of stakeholders. There are, however, a number of clear guiding principles that underpin durable reform. These are:

**Accountability.** Building an accountable and responsive public service is helped where the aid system, recipient governments and local level delivery agencies aim to include the poor, and particularly women, in the policy design, implementation and monitoring process. WaterAid's experience in Country Programmes has demonstrated that citizen-led accountability mechanisms can help set up services that are equitable and non-discriminatory in the targeting of service delivery systems. Through processes of community-led mapping and inclusive decision-making, communities can own planning systems and are better able to hold service-providers to account for poor performance.

**Transparency.** If the aid agenda is also an empowerment agenda, it follows that information about the sector – its duty-holders, the terms, volume and purposes of public finance for the sector – needs to be made available in forms that are accessible to intended beneficiaries. Donors can help in this effort by encouraging the inclusion of domestic stakeholders in Sector Review, Consultative Group and Coordination meetings.

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**Water and Sanitation as an essential public service.** DFID's 2006 White Paper Making Governance Work for the Poor marks an important first official recognition in the UK that the water and sanitation sector amounts to an essential public service alongside health and education. This recognition can be built on when senior members of the UK Government attempt to build a UK and international narrative around international development priorities by including water and sanitation alongside health and education. DFID itself can clearly establish the linkages between the three sectors by reporting and establishing cross-references to water and sanitation in the programming and progress reports in health and education at country and international levels.

These essential services are the responsibility of governments to coordinate, provide, finance, and regulate because by their nature, access or lack of access to them impact not just on individuals and individual households, but on society, economic development and poverty reduction as a whole.

**DFID's engagement.** The Department faces the challenge of a rising budget for the sector, but managed by a reduction in the numbers of officials managing the funds. In the recent past, there have been instances where recipient governments' sector plans have benefited from discrete DFID interventions. WaterAid believes that the benefits of the Department's nuanced approach is not replicable, at least in the short term, by the multilateral agencies that will, increasingly, be responsible for disbursing DFID's growing aid budgets. WaterAid has come across some recent concrete examples where DFID's withdrawal from the sector has produced negative results. The Department needs to seriously address the mismatch between its senior level political commitment to the sector and some of its country offices withdrawing financial and personnel support.

**Subsidiarity.** DFID needs to develop a procurement policy around its Technical Assistance support for the sector and an engagement with the policy-making process that helps build national 'policy communities' capable of diagnosing systemic bottlenecks and identifying and implementing the remedial policies.

In summary, the guiding principle behind DFID's and the donor community's engagement with the sector can be distilled as a commitment to the promise that: ***All Country Plans, will be fully funded, owned and delivered locally***

## Summary of other key recommendations for DFID

- **Make meeting the water and sanitation MDGs a departmental priority.** This requires the inclusion of a target for departmental performance in the sector in the next Public Service Agreement, a re-think of current policy frameworks and a clear strategy for the scaling-up of support to the sector that has the full buy-in of country programmes and all directorates;
- **Reverse the withdrawal of personnel with expertise in water and sanitation from country programmes.** Build country programmes based on the recognition of the value of discrete interventions and visible political support;
- **Strengthen the linkages between health, education and water and sanitation.** Increase recognition within country programmes that water and sanitation, alongside health and education, is one of the three essential and interdependent public services;
- **Target resources aimed at capacity building at the local level,** either through setting a percentage of programme funding to be set aside for longer term strengthening of local level capacity, or through the setting up of Water Governance Funds based in recipient countries tasked with diagnosing systemic bottlenecks at local level and targeting resources until systems are

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sufficiently robust;

- **Increase scrutiny of multilateral aid** to ensure that the policies and lending practices of these institutions are pro-poor and do not impose policy conditions. Question the balance of grants and loans within the multilateral aid portfolio;
- **Rebalance policy and financial support to strengthen publicly run utilities to deliver pro-poor services.** Actively support public utilities to support each other, share knowledge and learn from each other's successes (in particular through public-public partnerships);
- **Invest resources in raising the political profile of sanitation at the international level** and in stimulating research and thinking on how best to support the sector.
- **Use resources innovatively to strengthen in-country systems:** Invest in the development of sector-wide plans and investment programmes. Build upon the success of past secondments of advisory staff within government water ministries or finance ministries. Support research into policy options which would provide better evidence for recipient government decision making. And support public forums and citizen mechanisms to hold providers accountable.