

Taps for Town?

Exploring public water tap management in Addis Ababa

Briefing Note 2 (Water Aid Ethiopia)

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Summary:

WaterAid Ethiopia commissioned a study of public water taps operated by various different actors in Addis Ababa in 2005, with the aim of investigating management practices. In the feedback of a preliminary study, the Addis Ababa Water Supply and Sewage Authority (AAWSSA) agreed that there is a need for improvements in the management of public water taps in the city. Therefore this research puts forward recommendations as to how their management can be regularised and improved, which have been jointly agreed with AAWSSA.

Keywords

Financial management
Urban sector reform
Employment
Regulation



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Introduction

WaterAid Ethiopia commissioned a study of public water taps operated by various different actors in Addis Ababa in 2005, with the aim of investigating management practices. In the feedback of a preliminary study, the Addis Ababa Water Supply and Sewage Authority (AAWSSA) agreed that there is a need for improvements in the management of public water taps in the city. Therefore this research puts forward recommendations as to how their management can be regularised and improved, which have been jointly agreed with AAWSSA.

The research found that due to the absence of regulation of the public water tap system, various problems were occurring. It was found that public tap users are paying more for their water than domestic connections and the prices at public taps varied widely. Many taps are used by large numbers of households; on the other hand, others are under-utilised and therefore unsustainable. Data on public water taps is inaccurate, with many connections wrongly categorised. All the functioning public taps employ tap attendants and for many, the taps provide their sole source of income.

This Briefing note summarises the research, together with the key findings and recommendations arising from the full survey report. Copies of this Briefing note and the full research document will soon be available to download at www.wateraidethiopia.org or from the WaterAid Ethiopia offices in Addis Ababa.

Background

WaterAid Ethiopia (WAE) carried out an initial study of selected public water taps after consultation with WaterAid partners who were concerned about poor public tap management practices in some instances. The first study documented detailed case studies of different public water points around the city, and found that experiences varied. After discussion with WaterAid, AAWSSA proposed that the regulation of public water taps in the city be taken over by the Micro and Small Enterprises Development Agency (MSEDA). MSEDA requested that WaterAid carry out a full survey of all the public water taps in the city, in order to make recommendations and prepare operational guidelines to improve the overall management of public taps.



WaterAid/ Caroline Irby

Alganesh Yehwala, tap attendant at Kebele 6 Addis Ababa: "I am responsible for this water point and the washing troughs. We charge 5c for a bucket and there are at least 40 customers every day."

Methodology

The data collection for this survey was carried out in all sub-cities of Addis Ababa by 71 water meter readers employed by AAWSSA, as it was noted that they have good access and knowledge of the public water taps in the city. A questionnaire was prepared in Amharic and the water meter readers attended an orientation programme to prepare them for the task of data collection. The questionnaire was amended according to the comments of the data collectors, AAWSSA and MSEDA. Two experts, appointed by the WAE-commissioned consultant and AAWSSA, as well as by AAWSSA branch office level coordinators, were responsible for supervising and monitoring the survey. In cases where the data was incomplete or inconsistent, the questionnaires were returned to the data collectors for further correction or confirmation. The collected information was compiled using a computer programme to facilitate data analysis.

Key findings

- AAWSSA supplied a list of 1611 public water connections for the research, of which 268 could not be found for various reasons and 43 were identified as non-public connections that had been wrongly identified. The data collectors identified a further 114 connections

that charge as public taps, but were not included in the list. Therefore, the total number of public taps studied in the research is 1414.

- The majority of the taps - 68% - are under *kebele* [local government administration] management. Others are under community management, while a smaller number of public taps are managed by private individuals, NGOs, Community Associations or Boards of Trustees. In some cases it was not possible to identify those responsible for the management.
- 82% of the taps surveyed are functional and of the non-functional taps; over half were disconnected due to non-payment of bills to AAWSSA.
- The number of hours per day that the functioning taps were operational is generally short – 59% are open for up to 4 hours a day and 22% for only an hour or less. This could reflect lack of demand or that the tap attendant is not willing or able to serve for longer. In an estimated 10% of cases more than 60 households use each water connection; in around 53% of cases, between 10 and 30 households use each tap; and 16% serve less than 10 households.
- The buying price of water from AAWSSA is standardised at 1.45 Birr per cubic metre (equivalent of \$0.018); however the selling price for customers is not uniform. **The selling prices range from 1.72 times to more than 8 times the buying price.** In around two thirds of cases, the price charged is 0.10 Birr for a 20 litre bucket or equivalent to 5 Birr per cubic metre, or more than 3 times the selling price.
- The revenue from around 78% of the public water taps is less than 10 Birr a day and some taps make less than 1 Birr a day. Only 5% have additional facilities such as public showers, toilets or washbasins, but 36% have space to construct such facilities. Just over half are unfenced.
- Data about the tap attendants was also collected for the survey, and it was found that the majority have an education level between basic literacy and Grade 11. Smaller numbers are either illiterate or educated to Grade 12 level or beyond. Around three quarters are female and 69% report that their employment as a tap attendant provides their sole source of income, with 93% earning less than 100 Birr a month, and 40% of these earning less than 50 Birr a month. Half have served as tap attendants for 1-5 years, while over a quarter have been employed for more than 10 years.

Recommendations

Need for regulation

Public water taps provide an important service for the urban poor and there is a need to streamline and monitor all the public taps in the city under one uniform mandate. It is recommended that the Environmental Development Office (EDO) of the City Government is given the responsibility for regulating the overall operation of public water taps. As the regulation and coordination task will take time and resources, EDO is advised to establish within its structure a unit dedicated to public tap management.

Development and implementation of guidelines

There are already general guidelines with respect to the handover and management of community based projects that are implemented by the City Government in collaboration with the community, but it is important to develop and utilise specific guidelines for the handover, management and operation of public water points. In support of this study, operational guidelines have been prepared which define the technical, administrative and financial aspects of public water tap management in Addis Ababa. Therefore, EDO is advised to implement these guidelines in the management and operation of public water taps in the city.

Micro enterprise opportunities

Once the overall regulatory function is given to EDO, the most feasible management option for the operation of public water taps is to outsource these to private individuals, giving preference to the poor and unemployed. The process of outsourcing could be done through the Micro and Small Enterprises Development Agency (MSEDA) of the Bureau of Trade and Industry of the City Government. It is recommended that the following public taps are transferred to MSEDA: all functional public water taps managed by *kebele* administration, all non-functional public water taps that have been disconnected due to non-settlement of bills or technical problems and all public water taps managed by individuals.

Regulated selling prices

The selling price of water to public water tap users can be specific to the conditions of each tap. However, the range of the mark-up on the buying price from AAWSSA should not be as wide as it is at present; an acceptable price range should be established and public water taps should be regulated to fix their selling prices within the established range.

Accurate connection data

The survey found that there are several private water tap connections that are wrongly charged as public connections and vice versa, as well as connections listed as public taps but charged at domestic rates. Therefore, AAWSSA is advised to make the necessary adjustments to their data.

Sustainability

The sustainability of public water taps is related to their capacity to generate revenue at least sufficient to cover operating expenses. Theoretically, AAWSSA set as a standard 60 household users per public tap. However, most of the public taps are operating a long way below the standard and the results indicate that there are around 161 public water taps with less than 10 households using them. AAWSSA is advised to look into these 161 taps with a view to changing the connection contract to a yard connection.

Providing a necessary service

The survey findings indicate that there are 114 public water taps that are providing services to over 60 households each. EDO is advised to carry out further investigations and if necessary construct additional public taps in these cases. On the other hand, some 39 public taps ceased operation due to lack of customers and AAWSSA is advised to cancel the contract of such taps and to remove the infrastructure.

Providing employment

All the functional public water taps have public tap attendants, whose years of service range from less than a year to more than twenty years and most depend on the employment as their sole source of income. EDO is advised to bring into operation all non-functional public taps specified above as well as additional taps if necessary, and MSED A to recruit new tap attendants to run their operation. Criteria in the selection of tap attendants need to be drawn up, in order to promote income generation for particularly vulnerable groups among the urban poor.

Building capacity

In collaboration with AAWSSA, WaterAid Ethiopia and UNHABITAT (Under Water for African Cities Programme), EDO/ MSED A are advised to build the capacity of the tap attendants, both new and existing, in terms of training and equipping them with additional facilities.

Conclusion

It is recognised that the management and operation of public water taps in Addis Ababa have encountered major problems, including:

- Lack of streamlining of systems for management and operation, resulting in different stakeholders operating different systems
- Difficulty in accessing accurate information, as the database at utility level is not well organised
- Low standards of service delivery in many cases, including frequent interruption of water supply services
- Above all, the operators pay a subsidised rate, which is the lowest rate in the tariff block, but are charging a tariff rate, which is far higher than the highest rate set for private connections. This is contrary to the Water Resource Management Policy of Ethiopia, that proposes subsidised tariff rates for communal water services

All the above problems are the result of absence of a regulatory body that can control the management and operation of public water points in the city. During the course of this study it was noted that the Environmental Development Office (EDO) of the city government has been given the mandate of monitoring/ regulating community based projects implemented by city government in collaboration with the community, including public water points financed by city government and the community. Accordingly, it is recommended that EDO take on the mandate of ensuring an effective system for the management and monitoring of public water taps in Addis Ababa.

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