

Introduction

Over the past decade, it has become common knowledge that residents of low-income urban communities are paying for effective, affordable pro-poor WASH services. A few smart utilities have pioneered ways of providing viable inclusive services.

WaterAid has worked with some of these utilities over the last two decades, resulting in a win-win scenario for both customer and utility. In recent times, more utilities have approached WaterAid for similar support to help them establish specialised Low-income Customer Support Units.

WaterAid has compiled a set of case studies to explore how utilities have set up and sustained successful Low-income Customer Support Units in urban areas. It is hoped that this will help deepen understanding and share lessons on the critical context and professional conditions necessary to establish successful pro-poor service units.

We draw on the experiences of utilities through three case studies in Uganda, Malawi and Bangladesh, and desk research in Zambia and Kenya. A synthesis of the common findings of the five case studies is included to inspire those utilities willing to emulate the good practices identified.

It is hoped that further support through peer-to-peer partnerships between similar utilities will be explored on the back of this process, to help interested utilities set up their own pilot under the facilitation of WaterAid and the Africa Water Association (AfWA) WOP-Africa programme. These pilots will operate under the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA)-Africa protocol. This will have the effect of not only benefiting the relevant state or cities, where the utility operates, but also open up a new line of peer support under GWOPA.

Summary of case studies:

Bangladesh

In Dhaka, Bangladesh, water service delivery in informal settlements is achieved through a successful tri-partite partnership between CBOs, NGOs and the utility. This case study captures the process leading to the development of this NGO-triggered pro-poor partnership. It explores the efforts of the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority to establish a Low-income Customer Support Unit for water service provision, as well as the urban water policy context and drivers of the success of the utility's pro-poor model.

Malawi

This case study examines how a highly indebted water kiosk operation was transformed into a well performing pro-poor water supply service unit, through a Water Users Association model. It outlines the urban water policy context, and discusses the remaining challenges and potentials of the Kiosk Management Unit within Lilongwe Water Board.

Uganda

In Uganda, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation has been instrumental in providing water services to the urban poor across informal settlements in Kampala. This case study follows the story of this globally acclaimed highly performing utility, and how it came to establish a successful pro-poor service unit. The case study also discusses the national water policy context, utility reforms and the tariff and subsidy regimes that have enabled the pro-poor unit to deliver effective services to urban poor communities.

Acknowledgements

Project Management Timeyin Uwejamomere
Project Consultant Mary O'Connell

Case studies writers

Bangladesh Partha Hefaz Shaikh (consultant)
Malawi Mary O'Connell (consultant)
Uganda Aditi Chandak

This report should be cited as:
*WaterAid (2016) Low-income Customer Support Units:
How utilities are successfully serving poor people.*