

Small towns learning series Summary

July 2020



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WaterAid/ Behailu Shiferaw

Introduction

Small towns and secondary cities contain half of the urban population worldwide, but receive much less political attention and funding than large cities. Their growth isn't matched by access to basic services, and sanitation in particular lags behind. Moreover, public sector capacity is typically low in these towns and unclear mandates, limited financing and complex technological solutions compound the issues.

For these reasons, WaterAid has chosen in the Urban framework to focus increasingly on small towns for programmatic and advocacy work. As sanitation is often poorly developed, we wanted to reflect on the lessons from three recent projects conducted by WaterAid, in order to inform further programmes.



WaterAid

The small town sanitation learning series

The three learning notes describe the following projects which were led by WaterAid:

- In **Sakhipur, Bangladesh**, the improvements across the whole sanitation chain, and notably the installation of a co-composting plant, thanks to long-term work with authorities and residents.
- In **Babati, Tanzania**, an action research project to co-create a sanitation and hygiene plan between authorities and residents.
- In **20 towns of Ethiopia**, a capacity-building initiative aimed at town utilities, to help turn them around and start consider sanitation options.



Success factors

The projects were all different and we encourage you to look at each learning note. Here are some common success factors, where WaterAid played a significant role:

- 1. Good quality technical support**, from WaterAid or from well-chosen academic and industry partners, and using a range of support methods, such as mentoring.
- 2. Fostering political momentum and ownership for sanitation**, by understanding local incentives and blockages and working with sanitation champions.
- 3. A modern, town-wide approach to sanitation**, for instance with circular economy principles (Bangladesh), linking solid and liquid waste management, and suggesting alternatives to sewers through training (Ethiopia) and scenario planning (Tanzania).
- 4. Creative partnerships**, such as involving mentor utilities (Ethiopia), agricultural authorities (Bangladesh) and research institutions (Tanzania).
- 5. Shit-Flow Diagrams** have proven to be a particularly effective tool to gather initial data (especially when involving officials in data collection), advocacy and initial planning.

These success factors should be considered in our interventions at the small town level for the development of inclusive WASH services. However, it is important to point out that these cities are as different from each other, hence the importance of adapting them to the different contexts that characterize small towns. WaterAid will continue to document its experiences in this specific environment in order to better understand these complex human settlements for the implementation of adapted approaches.



More information

You can find more information on WaterAid and sanitation at <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/small-town-sanitation>

This is part of a series of learning notes on small town sanitation with the link above.



WaterAid/Al-Emran

▲ A worker prepares to empty a Vacutag sludge pump in Sakhipur

