

Meeting the Challenges: Who Should Do What?

THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (WSSD) Plan of Implementation recognized that achieving the MDG targets for water supply and sanitation would necessitate the active collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders—not just government agencies. This includes, specifically, local communities as the main drivers of change, and the private sector as a potentially key collaborator in providing poor people with affordable choices in a sustainable and efficient manner. The basis for building such collaborations is the recognition that different types of organization have different capabilities and different roles to play. This perspective is reflected in the WSSD principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.”

The scale of investments needed to achieve the MDG targets in Asia and the Pacific is, as we have seen, considerable but achievable. Indeed, the current trends suggest that many countries in the region will reach the water supply target in particular. Those that do will do so because they are able to draw on the capabilities *and* the finances of all sections of society and, in particular, have systems where local communities invest their own resources in services that meet their needs. The estimated levels of investments needed to meet the targets, some \$8 billion a year, are well within the capabilities of most countries in the region. But, we cannot rely on governments alone, even where the international community actively supports them with money and other resources.

Time is of the essence. For increased access to safe water supplies and sanitation services to have an effect on the other MDGs, governments must act swiftly in prioritizing the water sector on its development and poverty reduction agenda. At the same time, governments cannot afford to proceed with poorly-informed plans.

Knowledge gained can mean time and investment gains. The challenges associated with institutional change and capacity building, and with creating new financing mechanisms outlined above, do take time to plan and implement. Governments in the region should consider conducting national assessments to be used as an informative basis for national water sector strategies. These should be executed as joint exercises that involve the perspectives of different stakeholders in building a consensus of what changes are needed, what actions have priority, and who should do what.

One key issue to this collaborative process is defining who should do what in the development of new partnerships and approaches to cooperation in water supply and sanitation development. The goal is to make use of the advantages that different stakeholders have in terms of their skills, resources, and perspectives on the sector. The new partnerships need to build their strategies on the key directions of the following four main groupings of stakeholders: (i) people, communities, and civil society; (ii) governments, including policy

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makers, central ministries, local government agencies, and the support given by international development partners; (iii) the private sector; and (iv) relevant international stakeholders.

People, communities, and civil society

This fundamental group of stakeholders comprises the very families we are trying to extend access to safe and sufficient water and improved sanitation, the organizations that represent and involve them and organizations from the rest of society that support the poor. These communities and organizations are central to any development of water supply and sanitation. In particular, working with local people provides

- Knowledge of their real needs and priorities, the condition and sustainability of local water resources, the many types of long-standing and effective solutions to their problems and the local traditions and customs that need to be understood if awareness programs are to be effective.

- Skills of many sorts, including the practical skills of masonry and plumbing needed to build and maintain water supply and sanitation facilities, the skills needed to make home-based livelihood activities viable, and organizational skills needed to plan, construct and operate water supply and sanitation facilities.

- Resources from the people themselves, which experience in many parts of the region show that people are both willing and able to pay for water supplies and sanitation where the technology choices and materials are appropriate and available.

- Augmentation of knowledge, skills, and resources of local people through their willingness to work with civil society, which are in turn effective at introducing innovations that ensure these local assets can be used more effectively. They are also often important in assisting to develop community-based organizations that are fair and representative, and can

play a key role in assisting local communities to relate to government agencies and other external organizations.

The discussion about local communities, and even the poor, does not mean to generalize them as a homogeneous group. They are differentiated along gender, economic, and social lines. These different groups often have extremely different, even conflicting, needs and interests. It is consequently essential to ensure that organizations that purport to represent the poor are indeed representative of all sections of the poor and not just some dominant interests. Where this is the case, the contribution of local communities to the sustainable and effective development of water supply and sanitation facilities will go far in determining whether and when the MDG targets will be met.

Governments

Key government figures in advancing water supply and sanitation coverage should include policy makers, central ministries, and local government agencies. Collectively, they represent a variety of perspectives. The four points discussed under defining the challenges above give many pointers to the key role that different branches of government should play in ensuring that the investments needed to meet the MDG targets are made. International development partners can and do support governments in many ways for each of the points listed below. The role of government agencies, together with donors, are consolidated as:

- Establishing the policy, legal, and regulatory environment, as discussed above. It is of utmost importance to clarify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and remove restrictions and perverse incentives that prohibit private sector investments and inhibit community initiatives to develop water supply and sanitation solutions. Particular attention needs to be paid to the regulatory and institutional context for ensuring that appropriate financial mechanisms exist.

- Directly investing in water supply and sanitation in key areas. This includes (i) urgently investing in water supply and sanitation facilities in schools, health care facilities, and other public places; (ii) targeted programs of investments that aim to reach places where private initiatives and the market are not likely to provide solutions, including serving and subsidizing the poorest of the poor and investing in areas such as large rural settlements, cities, and peri-urban areas where the only viable options are multi-household facilities. A key issue is the nature and effectiveness of cost recovery mechanisms if the investments are to last.

- Providing financing and credit for investments made by others, whether communities, the private sector or other organizations. This can take many forms, including the existing banking systems, direct credits to NGOs or other organizations, and dedicated credit systems established under projects and others. There is a need to make such systems flexible, appropriate to the needs of the poor (with issues such as collateral a particular concern) and, above all, permanent. Far too many credit systems have been set up under projects only to wither away once the project support is over.

- Advocacy, education, and awareness connected with issues of health and hygiene promotion, ensuring environmental sustainability, informing people of their rights and responsibilities, and assisting communities to access government programs and other resources. Ministries and agencies with responsibilities in the health and education fields have a particularly important role in this area.

- Monitoring and enforcement of regulations concerning key issues, such as water quality and wastewater disposal, technical standards for facilities, any regulations to ensure fair financial conditions for investments and service provision, and the registration and regulation of organizations that represent local communities (Endnote 15 on WHO Guidelines).

- Supporting innovations through

both research and development that generate new options and, perhaps more importantly in the short term, establish conditions where good practices can be scaled up to a level where they make a real and sustainable impact on the ground. Local universities and other research institutions are of pivotal importance here.

Because the water sector and all its varied subsectors (supply, sanitation, irrigation, drainage, resource management, etc.) are often divided between many different government departments and agencies, reforms and the regular overseeing of these subsectors can be extremely fragmented. Governments need to establish apex bodies that bring inter-government coordination. In the area of investments, different tiers of government consequently have a complex and pivotal role in ensuring that investments are made and other aspects of water supply and sanitation development are implemented in ways that are fair, sustainable, and efficient in economic, environmental, and social terms. Although governments do have an important role in the direct implementation of some types of investment, this is not their primary role, but one of many roles.

Private Sector

The private sector has increasingly been recognized as having a key role in water supply and sanitation development. The private sector takes different forms and can perform a variety of roles. The one that has attracted the most attention (and criticism, whether justified or not) is where large private corporations, including multinationals, have taken over the management of water utilities in major cities. The experience in these ventures has been mixed, but lessons are being learned and there is scope for improving approaches for the engagement of appropriate private sector corporations in many rapidly growing urban areas.

This high-profile role of the private sector is not, by a long way, the most important one in water supply and sanita-

tion provision in Asia and the Pacific. Of far greater importance, whether judged economically or by numbers of people served, is the role of local, generally small, entrepreneurs in providing a wide range of services to support and make investments in and the operation of water supply and sanitation facilities. Small, local private sector entrepreneurs provide the following range of services in water supply and sanitation:

- Manufacturing and distribution of materials and equipment, including pipes, latrine pans, pumps, bricks, water tanks, and many others. The availability of these materials through local retail outlets is essential if people are to invest directly in addressing their needs.

- Constructing and maintaining facilities, including drilling wells, laying pipes, building latrines, and all other aspects of the work needed to turn investments into facilities. These can be communal or individual, but the existence of the skills and equipment among local small businesses to build and look after water supply and sanitation facilities is essential for the sustainability of investments.

- Service providers in the form of water sellers, whether they are the operators of small piped schemes or vendors who bring water to people's homes. These are often small and informal, and are often the only reliable source of water in low-income urban areas. They can be efficient, but are often extremely expensive. Despite this, they provide a service when no others are available.

- Providing inputs and markets for the goods and services produced in home-based livelihood activities that depend on domestic water supplies. The viability of these livelihood activities depends on the availability of the inputs and good access to markets, which are most often local.

The scale of such small-scale private sector involvement is extremely difficult to estimate, but in many countries appears to be large, often larger than the services provided by government agencies if mea-

sured by number of people connected or served. These local investments also tend to be economically efficient to provide facilities at a lower unit cost than those provided by government or through donor projects and to be sustainable and responsive to consumer needs and demands. Such investments can also be important in generating local economic development through the multiplier effects they generate. The private sector, and especially local entrepreneurs, has long been neglected in many government and donor activities in the sector. It is essential that this is reversed, and the private sector be recognized as a key stakeholder in the sector if the MDG targets and the needs of the poor are to be met efficiently and sustainably.

Relevant International Stakeholders

The international community has been playing a major role in creating an environment conducive to partnerships, commitment, investment, and accountability in development. The important challenges discussed in the previous section also require involvement of the relevant international stakeholders to monitor, promote, and support the process of developing the region's water sector and advancing it toward the MDGs and sustainable socioeconomic growth in the region.

The title of this chapter asked, "Who should do what?" The discussion above gives some answers to this question. In many ways, we need integrated approaches where different stakeholders work together and are driven from below. Indeed, this could apply to almost any sector and are conventional wisdoms of international development approaches. This familiarity does not invalidate them, however—the need for these approaches has been recognized in principle but all too often not followed through into practice in a comprehensive manner. There are elements of these approaches in almost all

countries. What is needed is for these elements to be drawn together into a coherent national strategy. This will create the conditions where the levels of investments needed to achieve and surpass Target 10 can be realized throughout Asia and the Pacific. As it is, great progress is being made in the region. But more can be done where governments, supported by international development partners, act to ensure that the capabilities and resources of all sections of society are utilized to their full potential for a sector that is one of the keys to the reducing the poverty of hundreds of millions of people in the countries of Asia and the Pacific.

Next Steps

The immediate next steps of all four key stakeholder groups should be in the direction of aggressive sanitation interventions to meet Target 10, or at least come closer than what the dismal projections warn. It has long been argued that sanitation should be promoted as part of integrated

rural development plans and programs, urban upgrading, or primary health care, or at least together with water supply and hygiene education (Cairncross, 1992). The belief was that by combining sanitation with water supply, it would prevent it from being neglected. There is increasing concern, however, that this is not always the case. There have been cases where the implementing agency has appropriate staff or structures for one component but not the sanitation element. Also, just because several interventions are planned together does not mean they progress at the same speed. As Cairncross points out, the pace of sanitation implementation is set not by administrative ability to provide facilities but by consumer demand so that it rarely matches the progress of other measures.

Clearly, each case must be weighed on its own merits and an analysis of the local situation. There may also be practical reasons for water supply and sanitation to be dealt with separately.