



Water and sanitation services to the urban poor

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AFRICA HAS THE lowest water supply and sanitation coverage of any region in the world. More than 1 in 3 Africans have no access to improved water supply or to sanitation facilities. Coverage levels in 2000 for both water supply (62%) and sanitation (60%) are about the same. The sad reality is that the total number of people without these services is increasing; unless we act now, the absolute number will double by 2020 from 200 million to 400 million¹. The majority of these people will be those living in informal or peri-urban areas and rural communities.

Africa is also currently the fastest urbanizing region in the world. Between 1990 and 2025 the total urban population is expected to grow from 150 million to 700 million showing an increase from 30% to 52% of total population. **By 2020 over 50% of the population in developing countries will reside in urban centres.** Rapid urbanization is a critical challenge for those providing services to urban centres. Unable to keep up with the speed of population growth, many urban centres have experienced a substantial increase in the numbers living below the poverty line in informal or unplanned settlements (known by different names but with similar characteristics). Some parts of cities are appallingly lacking in acceptable housing and living conditions. They range from high density, squalid central city tenements to sprawling, spontaneous squatter settlements without legal recognition or rights, on the outskirts of cities. Some are more than fifty years old, some are land invasions just underway. Although these settlements now house between 40% and 70% of the urban population, most lack adequate and affordable basic services such as water supply and sanitation. Most developing countries share the same lack of, or less than basic levels of, municipal services - water, sanitation, waste collection, storm drainage, street lighting, paved footpaths, roads for emergency access, land title, poor housing structures etc., which causes occupants to be exposed to disease and vulnerable to natural disasters.¹

Visible disparities between slums and better-off neighbourhoods increase the social tensions in poorer areas and unplanned growth of settlements makes conventional service provision complicated.

Low-income earners not only bear the cost of poor infrastructure and services, but also pay higher costs than rich families for lower levels of service. Poverty levels are highest in this part of the population.

As the informal settlements represent between 40% and 70% of the urban population, they inevitably are becoming the majority of future utility customers.

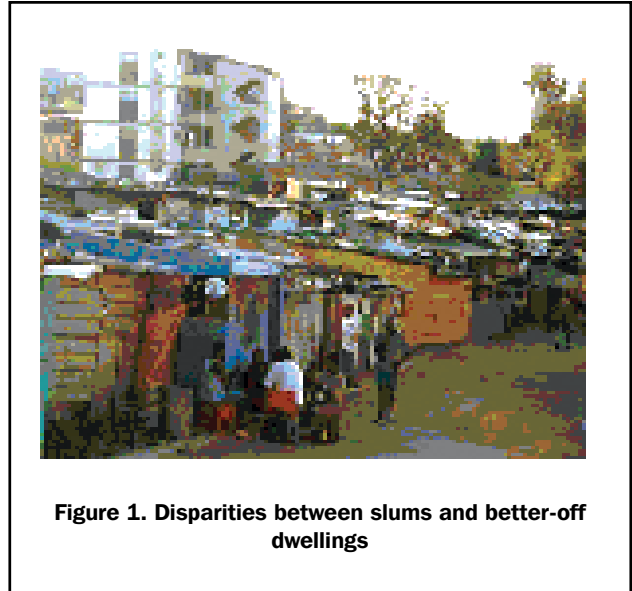


Figure 1. Disparities between slums and better-off dwellings

Urban utilities² have (*unfortunately*) often failed to provide water and sanitation services to low-income customers, settlers on illegal or low-grade land and residents of transient communities.³ This is because low-income communities are perceived to be financially unreliable, transient, difficult to identify and expensive to reach⁴. Serving “informal” consumers is often left to social welfare departments or NGOs and CBOs. Investments in such communities are usually supply-driven. While the rural sector has recognized the power of demand-responsive approaches it is difficult to replicate these lessons in urban settings where individual demand must be aggregated and community demand balanced against the needs and constraints of the urban system⁵. Services also break down because of the low priority given to operational budgets.

The Water Utility Partnership for Capacity Building Africa⁶ has undertaken case studies about provision of water and sanitation services to the urban poor, in nine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This has been within the context of one of its projects - “Strengthening the Capacity of Utilities to deliver Water and Sanitation Services, Environmental Health and Hygiene Education to Low Income Urban Communities”. The nine countries include Cote D’Ivoire, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Mali. Each participating country selected a case featuring one utility.

The project was based on the premise that in most countries, utilities and other agencies (*Government, NGOs, private sector, municipalities*) are already undertaking innovative approaches (*good practices*) to provide water and sanitation services in low income/informal settlements and in hygiene awareness. These approaches are often piecemeal and the basis for scaling them up is neither well developed nor well documented. The project was therefore aimed at developing a better understanding, of key principles underlying “good practices” which have assisted in improving access to water and sanitation services for low income communities in some countries and to disseminate these through a toolkit. The profile of the participating utilities is given at the end.

Issues affecting service delivery to the urban poor

Many of the problems facing service delivery to low-income communities are common to all nine cities where case studies were undertaken. These include difficult physical access, lack of physical planning, inappropriate technology, inadequate consultation, limited community participation, socio-economic constraints, and poor information, education and communication. Certain problems are influenced by the utility itself and demonstrate that good management and efficient and effective service delivery plays a key role in improving access and affordability for low-income consumers. These include poor payment of bills which is influenced by late/irregular billing and unreliable service among other factors, as well as unreliable consumer data.

Deficiencies in basic water and sanitation services for the poor have largely been influenced by the position that many governments have taken against infrastructure and service development in “informal” settlements. Such improvements were considered a “*pull factor*” that would attract additional in-migrants into informal settlements that were seen as temporary in nature. In many countries, policy and legislation have either discouraged or prohibited utilities and local authorities from providing services within these settlements. Where policies are not a limiting factor, difficult terrain or working conditions, and poor cost recovery hinder utility and local authority action. Below are some of the issues arising from the case studies.

Policies and Strategies

Usually Governments have the very noble goal or objective of “WATER FOR ALL”, but this is not usually supported by a clear policy framework. The study revealed that a number of countries do not have policies or strategies for dealing with provision of services to the urban poor.

Legislation

In many countries there is an urgent need to create appropriate and up-to-date legislation or reconcile existing, diverse legislation to permit systematic development of the water supply and sanitation sector especially in the informal settlements.

Regulation

Independent regulator/s should be established for all service providers - large and small, formal and informal, which provide standards broad enough to accommodate and create incentives for improving services to each type (low, middle and high income) of community.

Institutional framework/capacity

Inappropriate **institutional arrangements**, unclear utility mandates, local authorities and other water supply and sanitation agencies hinder service provision. Most utilities are not equipped to deal with complexities of the low-income communities. Furthermore lack of interagency coordination (*government and non-government*) leads to duplication of effort, contradictory actions and inconsistency in approaches used.

Unplanned nature of the communities

The **unplanned** nature of many low income settlements is perhaps a larger constraint to service delivery than land tenure, and remains the key bottleneck to service delivery in all countries. The actual nature of the problem differed in the case study countries but overcrowding, high densities, and lack of access are common hindrances. Poor data for planning, and population over or underestimation were also limiting factors.

Financing and cost recovery

Limited availability of **financing** and inadequate allocation of Government resources primarily affects low-income areas that are unplanned (*both legal and illegal*). While many utilities have ready access to finances for regular programmes, most financing agencies are not willing to invest resources in unplanned settlements. In addition, past policies regarding free water supply, and tariff subsidies, have contributed to a general perception that improving service delivery to low-income settlements is a loss-making activity. Poor billing and revenue collection by the utility and **socio-economic** factors such as low and/or irregular incomes have further compounded the problem.

Communication

Finally, **communication** between the utility and low-income urban communities on operation and maintenance issues is not common, and/or inappropriate **information** channels/messages are used to reach the community.

Table 1. Water and sanitation facilities

	Water	Sanitation	Low-income settlements	Population – National/Urban
MALAWI	Blantyre Water Board (Parastatal)	Municipal Council	Concentrated 53% in informal settlements,	10 million, 33% urban, 5.7 growth rate
TANZANIA	Dar es Salaam Water Supply Authority (PSP in process)	Sewerage Septic Tank Emptying (private and Municipality)	Dispersed 70% in informal settlements	29 million, 24% urban, 6.4% growth rate
ETHIOPIA	Addis Ababa Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Parastatal)	Sewerage and Septic Tank Emptying	Dispersed 20% in informal/peri-urban	55 million, 13% urban, Addis -2.4 million, 3.2% growth rate,
ZAMBIA	Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company (MC owned company)	Sewerage	Concentrated 70% of total,	9 million, 43% urban, 3.6% growth rate,
COTE D'IVOIRE	554 Urban Centers Lease/Concession (Private)	Contract to manage sewerage for Abidjan	Concentrated 20% in informal settlements	13.8 million, 43% urban, 5.3% growth rate
GHANA	National Water Company, (PSP in Process)	No responsibility of Municipality	Concentrated 50% in informal settlements	16.6 million, 36% urban, 4.3% growth rate,
NIGERIA	Kano State Water Board owned by Regional Government (Parastatal)	No responsibility of Local Government Administration	Traditional settlements and peri-urban pockets; 50% in informal settlements	108 million, 38% urban, 5 million in Kano State, 5.3% growth rate,
SENEGAL	National WS Company (SONES) Distribution Company (SDE) (10 year Lease)	Responsibility of ONAS (a parastatal company)	50% in informal settlements	8.3 million, 42% urban, 5.3% growth rate,
MALI	Electricite Du Mali National State owned Company (Now Private Company previously parastatal)	Local Authority	53% in informal settlements/peri-urban	10 million, 26% urban, Bamako 1 million; 36% urban 5.7% growth rate,

Sanitation

Sanitation services are not as well developed or institutionalized as water. Household facilities (*mainly on-site*) predominate and network services are often not economically viable for low-income households. Private sector involvement in household and public services is growing, and local governments are increasingly accommodating the private sector through franchising, leasing and licencing of their services.

Some selected good practices

Specialised Peri-urban Units within a utility (Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company, Zambia)

One of the good practices identified by the case studies was that existing in the Lusaka Water and Sewerage Corporation in Zambia was a specially dedicated unit for issues concerning peri-urban areas. Company policy on provision of services to the urban poor was also established.

A Peri-Urban Unit established as an interface between the Company and communities (whether assisted by an NGO or not)

Periurban targeted policies (Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire)

A special tax is levied on each water bill paid by all the consumers. The revenue from this special tax helps with capital costs for provision of water and sanitation services to the urban poor.

Social tariffs are charged and water re-selling is allowed (one must obtain a permit from the water company). There is a special tariff for social connections and yet the company responsible for provision of water and sanitation services in Cote D'Ivoire is a private Company.

Financing mechanisms - taxes, surtaxes (Abidjan, Dakar, Ouagadougou)

The taxes in Abidjan are mainly for water to the urban poor. But Dakar and Ouagadougou have special taxes whose revenues are used to finance sanitation services. This cross subsidy is used for providing funds for on-site sanitation

De-regulation of services - emptying (Tanzania, Ethiopia)

Utilities used to be responsible for all sanitation activities including emptying of septic tanks. This was de-regulated in Dar es Salaam and Addis Ababa. Immediately after this step the operational efficiency improved greatly.

Regulation of Service Providers (Accra (Ghana), Abidjan (Cote D'Ivoire))

Accra has a well-established tanker service. The quality of the water being sold is good because of the desire to work together with small scale independent providers. Ghana Water Company Limited devised a way of regulating the tanker services. The regulation is through contracts, leases and licences

Vendor/Tankers Associations (Kano (Nigeria), Abidjan, Accra)

The study found out that the water vendors (from those selling in carts (plastic containers) to those selling using water tankers –play a vital role in meeting the needs of the urban poor. Sometimes the price of water from these is high however with proper re-organization this may not necessarily be so.

Public awareness -Durban (South Africa)

There is good practice in Durban where theatre is used for community education. This is a good way of reaching urban poor communities, particularly on this important issue of water. Payment for services and care of facilities are usually the major problems in the informal settlements.

Conclusions

The case studies have come to an end and a good practices document has been developed. The WUP is now working on the toolkits that will be made available to all interested parties. Most importantly the toolkits will try to address issues already raised above. They will identify an issue and then give general principles on solutions, supported by problem solving methods in other countries.

However it is necessary to recognise the need for more effort to ensure that:

- Reform policies and laws include the poor and accommodate other service providers
- Developed regulations and guidelines reach the poor
- Water and Sanitation management is integrated
- Hygiene and health education initiatives are incorporated into core business
- Financing and improved is available access for consumers/SSIPs

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Key words

Water Supply, Services for the urban poor, sustainability, institutional development, legislative issues, finance, good practices, regulation

¹ Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment report by the UNICEF, WHO and Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council launched in November 2000

² Here utilities are taken to mean any private or public entity charged with providing water supply and/ or sanitation services to urban areas including informal settlements.

³ The study has revealed that in some cases utilities are explicitly prevented by policy or regulatory structure from serving such customers, but many others are mandated by law to provide at least a minimum basic level of supply to all.

⁴ Technologically these communities may present a genuine challenge because they occupy dense settlements on unstable or marginal land or due to the unplanned situation.

⁵ These would include environmental and public health concerns and the need for overall technical and financial integrity in the system.

⁶ A partnership established by the Union of African Water Suppliers (UAWS), TREND –Ghana, CREPA –Burkina Faso and the World Bank with its Headquarters in Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire