

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

The National Water and Sewerage Corporation experience in the provision of services to the urban poor

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Most governments and international agencies have committed themselves to achievement of Millennium Development Goals. The government of Uganda has stretched its target to achieve 100% safe water supply and Sanitation by 2015. Achievement of this target will only be possible if service providers make deliberate strategies and action is taken now to provide sustainable services to all mankind, the poor inclusive. This paper highlights the Ugandan experience in the provision of Water and Sanitation to the urban poor by the National Water and Sewerage Corporation in Jinja-Njeru Water and Sanitation area. It highlights service strategies, challenges, change management and lessons learned.

Introduction

Most world governments and international agencies have committed themselves to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Improved access to safe water and sanitation is a vital and an important ingredient to the achievement of these MDGs. Needless to emphasize, the improvement of water and sanitation provision to the poor is central in the achievement of the MDG target No. 10 of reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe water and sanitation. It's therefore imperative that service providers should urgently move away from the usual rhetoric, but translate the on paper strategies of delivery of watsan services to the poor into real action now.

The National development Goal for Uganda is to achieve 100% safe water supply and sanitation by 2015 to the entire country as opposed to the present safe water coverage of 65% urban and 55% for rural water supply. Further, the Government of Uganda has translated the MDG objectives into the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The PEAP pillar No.4 relates to enhancing the Quality of life for which improving access to clean and safe water is key

The key agencies responsible for urban water supply in Uganda are the NWSC (a semi Government parastatal) and the Local Governments with assistance from the Directorate of Water Development (Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment).

The NWSC is responsible for water and sewerage services for 15 major towns of Uganda including the Capital Kampala. This constitutes 80% of the large urban population of Uganda (i.e. towns with pop.>5000).

This paper highlights the Ugandan experience in the provision of Water and sanitation services to the urban poor with particular reference to the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) - Jinja area.

Issues about serving the poor

Some of poorest people in Uganda live in urban centres as opposed to rural areas with little or no means of income to pay for services. Secondly, serving the poor sustainably is about effectiveness and affordability by the poor because in circumstances where the poor have to pay for these services, they may resort to the use of unsafe water if they perceive the cost of treated water to be high. It's also worth noting that serving the urban poor often requires substantial investments in infrastructure with little or no expected returns and, resolution of legal issues that may arise due to extension of services to un gazetted and unplanned areas e.g. land tenure systems, legal framework etc.

The strategies adopted by the National Water and Sewerage Corporation have taken into consideration the above issues.

The National Water and Sewerage experience

- From 1998 the NWSC has implemented a number of performance enhancement programs to improve services to its customers including the poor. The latest being the Internally Delegated Management Contracts (IDAMC) between the Headquarters and the constituent areas.
- In Sept 2000, the GOU signed the first ever 3 year performance contract with the NWSC Board. An important requirement of the contract has been water services to the poor. This contract has since been renewed.
- The IDAMC are contracts between the NWSC HQs and the Management teams in the different towns in which it operates. The IDAMCs have inbuilt performance based

- incentives/disincentives for achievement of set targets that includes water to the poor.
- Tariff Policy: The NWSC tariff has an inbuilt subsidy mechanism in which the well to do pay more than the poor. The stand post price is the least.
 - Provision of public water stand pipes and kiosks has been adopted as the basic level of service.
 - Promotion of Yard taps to cut out the “middleman effect”. The new connection policy has had a positive impact on this.
 - IDAMC Policy: The IDAMCS have clear measurable targets to ensure that the poor are served.
 - Network intensification targeting the poorer communities to ensure access to safe water.
 - New connection Policy : The NWSC has with effect from July 2004 introduced a new connection policy in which:
 - Applicants only pay a small connection fee (equiv. to cost of meter)
 - NWSC provides all the materials and connect supply and lay up to 50 metres of the service pipe.
 - A new connections fund has been established in which a small surcharge of 10% is levied on the tariff.
 - An Estimated 15,000 Urban poor have been provided with access to safe water supply.
 - Walking distance to Kiosks has been reduced from an average 400m to 320m.
 - A total of 80 kiosks hitherto suppressed have been re-activated and sound management initiatives instituted for sustainability of service.
 - Average number of connections has increased from an average of 60 to 100 per month.
 - The beneficiary communities are involved in planning and implementation of service extension.
 - Monitoring mechanism of kiosk performance in place to avert build up of unpaid bills and subsequent disconnection of supply.
 - Communities are sensitized on the benefits of piped water supply and are encouraged to apply for yard taps to minimize the middle man effect when supplied through kiosks.

NWSC - Jinja pro poor performance trends

The areas operate as business units with greater degree of autonomy, with the role of both parties and a working framework detailed in a business plan. Jinja/Njeru water and sanitation area of estimated population of 250,000 persons is one of the constituent operational areas under National Water & Sewerage Corporation. In January 2004, Kiira Water Partnership signed a management contract under the IDAMC arrangement. The contract was designed to have among others, in built clear targets and incentives to serve the urban Poor. There has been marked performance improvement since the introduction of IDAMCs to date.

- A total 60 Km water mains targeting the poor communities have been laid, this has increased total service coverage by 5% from 81% to 86%. Use of comparatively cheaper locally manufactured HDPE pipes and fittings of proper pressure rating is promoted.
- UFW has reduced from 29% to 23% as result of effective management of administrative losses through strategic alliance with beneficiary communities especially the poor.

Pro- poor service provision challenges to NWSC

- Expanding services to the poor without compromising the financial viability of the Corporation.
- Improving instead of slipping from the current levels of service delivery as a result of high urban growth rates and other socio-economic forces.
- Mobilisation of resources (internal and external) to finance investments to not only serve the poor but improve services overall so as to meet MDGs.
- Need to Investment in Sewerage services
- Developing effective management systems to ensure existing services for the poor are operated reliably and in an affordable manner.

Lessons learned

- Subsidising access to services rather than consumption is vital since the poor already pay more for the services.
- It's necessary to develop and implement effective pro-poor policies and programs to provide watsan services to the poor.
- Effective coordination of efforts to serve the poor between different agencies is critical to avoid duplication.

- Performance based incentives for Utilities/Service providers are vital in ensuring sustainability of services to the poor.
- As much as possible involve the poor in the planning, implementation and operation of services in their areas.
- Utilities/service providers with sound financial and operational capabilities are better placed to serve the poor.

Conclusion

- Maximising the benefits of watsan services and indeed the achievement of the MDGs is clearly the expectation of all people (the poor inclusive), their governments and international agencies.
- Success will however only be attained through the effective implementation of pro poor policies and programmes.
- Serving the urban poor sustainably also requires that the Utilities and Service providers concerned operate on a sound operational and financial basis.
- Its high time Sanitation service provision came out distinctly rather being muzzled under water supply and eventually little or none is done at all.

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