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**LOCAL ACTION WITH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO IMPROVE AND  
SUSTAIN WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES**

**Formulation of water and sanitation policies  
and strategies: experiences from Rwanda**

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*This paper describes the process of formulation of Rwanda's National Water Supply and Sanitation Policies and Strategies, which were approved by the Cabinet in December 2016. The major steps in the process included conceptualisation (preparation of a concept note and work plan); constitution of a dedicated task force to oversee the process; engagement of international consultants; literature review and information collection; preparation of background papers; stakeholders' consultations; preparation of draft policies and strategies; review and quality assurance by the sector working group and the task force; consensus building; finalisation and approval. The process spanned almost two years and cost approximately US\$ 170,000, including the cost of external consultants and stakeholders' consultations. The case of Rwanda provides valuable lessons for other countries that plan to update their national water and sanitation policies and strategies in view of changes in the context and emerging issues and to ensure alignment with the SDGs.*

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**Background**

Rwanda has made remarkable progress in increasing access to improved water and sanitation to a large number of the population since the early 1990s. The coverage of improved water supply and sanitation in Rwanda was estimated at 85 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively, in 2014 (GoR, 2015).

The importance of adequate water supply and sanitation services as driver for social and economic development, poverty reduction and public health is fully acknowledged in Rwanda's flagship policy documents and national goals including Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy-II (GoR, 2013) and Vision 2020 (GoR, 2012). In order to achieve the water and sanitation sector goals, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) adopted the "National Policy and Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation Services" in 2010 (GoR, 2010), which built on the experiences of and lessons learned from the Sectoral Policy on Water and Sanitation – 2004.

The water and sanitation sector context in Rwanda has changed considerably since the adoption of the 2010 "National Policy and Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation Services". Major institutional reforms have been implemented since then resulting in the separation of energy and water and sanitation operations of the Energy, Water and Sanitation Agency and subsequent creation of Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC) Ltd and Rwanda Energy Group. A number of emerging issues were identified in the 2010 Policy and Strategy but have to be yet fully addressed. These include decentralization of water and sanitation services, sector financing mechanisms, performance of public-private sector arrangements, monitoring and evaluation, sustainability and further sector harmonization towards a sector-wide approach.

The GoR, therefore, decided to update the 2010 Water and Sanitation Policy and Strategy so as to align it with the second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS-2), which was developed in 2012, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with due consideration to the changes in context, emerging sector issues and best practices and lessons learned. Moreover, it was decided to develop

standalone policies for water supply and sanitation services to ensure adequate prioritisation and targeting, especially for sanitation related interventions.

This paper summarises the process followed by GoR for formulation of the new water and sanitation sector policies and the corresponding implementation strategies as well as related experiences and lessons learned.

## The process

The formulation of the policies and strategies was led by the Ministry of Infrastructure (MININFRA), the lead Ministry for water and sanitation sector in Rwanda, with technical and financial support from UNICEF. The major steps involved in the policy and strategy formulation process included the following:

1. A concept paper detailing the rationale and the proposed process to be followed for formulation of the policies and strategies along with work plan was developed, based on the review of process followed for the development of previous sector policies in Rwanda.
2. In order to ensure ownership and involvement of key players from the outset, a dedicated task force was set up to oversee the policy and strategy formulation process. The members of the task force, which was chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Infrastructure, included the Ministries of Health, Local Government, Finance and Economic Planning, and Natural Resources; Water and Sanitation Corporation; Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority; UNICEF; University of Kigali; Japan International Corporation Agency; African Development Bank; Private Sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including Water Aid and Water for People.
3. The concept paper and the work plan were presented to the senior management of MININFRA, the task force and Water and Sanitation Sector Working Group and subsequently revised in light of the feedback. The work plan proved to be a useful tool for tracking the progress during various stages of policy and strategy formulation process.
4. A consulting firm with relevant international and regional experience was engaged through an international competitive bidding process, led by MININFRA, in August 2015. The option of engaging a consulting firm, herein after referred to as consultants, rather than individual consultants was preferred to ensure better accountability and coordination and the fact the firm was able to deploy a range of international and local experts required for the task, including water and sanitation engineers as well as financial and institutional experts.
5. The consultants reviewed the related background documents including GoR's flagship policy documents such as Vision 2020, EDPRS-II, existing policies and plans related to WASH, health, natural resources management, environment; and commitments made by the GoR at the Sanitation and Water for All High Level Meeting (SWA-HLM) and related regional and global forums. The consultants also held individual meetings with key ministries and development partners to collect relevant information and solicit their views on various aspects of the policies and strategies. In order to ensure that the process was informed by a strong evidence-base and lessons learned in the past, relevant research studies, assessments and evaluations were shared with the consultants.
6. Based on the review of relevant documents and information collection exercise, the consultants prepared background papers which identified key sector issues to be addressed in the policies and strategies. The background papers were presented to the task force and sector working group and revised in the light of feedback.
7. Five provincial stakeholders' workshops, one per province, were organised to seek stakeholders' feedback on the background papers. These workshops were attended by the representatives of the provincial administration, districts, secondary cities, towns, villages, water user associations, NGOs and local water and sanitation operators.
8. The consultants prepared the draft policies and strategies on the basis of review of literature, individual meetings, background papers and additional issues identified by stakeholders during the stakeholders' workshops.
9. The draft policies and strategies were reviewed by MININFRA and also shared with line government agencies, sector partners and the task force members. The comments received were consolidated and shared with the consultants who revised the policies and strategies accordingly.
10. The revised policies and strategies were reviewed by the Sector Working Group and the task force for quality assurance and necessary changes were made to finalise the drafts.
11. A consultative meeting involving key ministries and government agencies was organised to discuss the final draft policies and strategies. In this meeting, consensus was achieved with regard to the roles and

responsibilities of various ministries, districts and other government agencies in implementation of the policies and strategies.

12. The draft policies and strategies were presented to and reviewed by the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee (IMCC) which is chaired by the Prime Minister of Rwanda. Following guidance from the IMCC, the policies and strategies were further revised and submitted to the Cabinet.
13. The draft policies and strategies were approved by the Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

The process of formulation of policies and strategies last for almost two years, including contracting period, literature review, stakeholder's consultations, drafting, consensus building, quality assurance and processing for approval by the Cabinet, and cost about US\$ 170,000.

### **Salient features of the policies and strategies**

The main components of the drinking water policy (GOR, 2016a) include scope of the policy and definitions of key terms such as water supply and access; policy context (the importance of water supply for the overall development of Rwanda); a summary of key sector challenges; vision, mission, principles, objectives and policy directions for six broad areas i.e. (i) enhancing access to rural water supply, (ii) sustainable functionality of rural water supply systems, (iii) access to and sustainability of urban water supply; (iv) water supply to institutions (v) strengthening and consolidating the sector's institutional, legal and capacity building framework, and (vi) cross cutting issues including environment and water resources management; gender; social inclusion; and climate change and disaster risk reduction.

The drinking water strategy (GoR, 2016b) presents sector performance indicators, targets and implementation strategies for each of the broad areas specified in the policy; financing requirements; institutional roles and responsibilities; coordination and cooperation requirements; and monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The key aspects of the sanitation policy (GoR, 2016c), which also incorporates hygiene, include the scope of the policy (collection, transport, treatment and disposal or reuse of both solid and liquid wastes including but not limited to human excreta, domestic and industrial waste as well urban storm water management), policy context (importance of sanitation and hygiene for overall development of Rwanda); summary of the key sector challenges; vision, mission, principles, objectives and policy directions for seven broad areas i.e. (i) individual sanitation and hygiene; (ii) institutional sanitation; (iii) off-site collective sanitation; (iv) storm water management; (v) solid waste management; (vi) electronic, industrial, radioactive and health care wastes; and (vii) sector institutional framework.

Like the drinking water supply strategy (GoR, 2016d), the sanitation strategy also presents sector performance indicators and targets for each of the broad areas specified in the sanitation policy; financing requirements; implementation strategies; institutional roles and responsibilities; coordination and cooperation requirements; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

### **Challenges and lessons learned**

The major challenge faced during the process was the lack of authentic data for establishment of the baselines for some of the sector performance indicators included in the water and sanitation sector strategies. This took extra efforts and time required to review and distil data from the available reports and come up with reasonable estimates for the benchmarks, and consequently caused some delays. To avoid such challenges in the future, MININFRA has decided to develop a comprehensive sector management information system (MIS) and the process for the engagement of consultants for MIS design is underway.

The key lessons learned during the process are summarised as follows:

1. The process of formulation of policies and strategies was led by MININFRA, GoR. The progress in this regard was regularly reviewed by the senior management of MININFRA including the Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of State in Charge of Energy and Water, Permanent Secretary and other senior officials. The senior management also provided valuable strategic guidance on critical aspects of the policies and strategies. The strong government leadership and ownership of the process, therefore, played a critical role in the formulation and approval of robust policies and strategies through a consultative process and without significant delays.
2. Engagement of a competent international consulting firm with strong relevant national and regional experience resulted in timely finalisation of the policies and strategies. It must, however, be noted that consultants cannot perform their job effectively unless there is a strong mechanism to support and monitor them. In this case, MININFRA and UNICEF deputed dedicated staff members who worked

with the consultants on a day-to-day basis to ensure that they were provided necessary support and guidance and that quality products were delivered timely in line with the agreed terms of reference.

3. The inclusive process i.e. involvement of the key ministries, government agencies and partners from the outset through setting up a task force helped ensure ownership, clarify roles and responsibilities of the ministries/government agencies involved and subsequently expedite the approval of the policies and strategies.
4. It is cost- and time-effective to develop policies and strategies back-to-back rather than developing policies in the first phase and then initiating work on strategies after approval of the policies.
5. Considering the fact that roles and responsibilities for water and sanitation sector service provision spread across several ministries and government agencies, delays in drafting, consensus building and approval process are likely. Due allowance should, therefore, be made for potential delays in the contract with the consultants at the contract award stage so as to reduce number of contract extensions and cost claims at a later stage.

## Conclusions

The consultative process followed by the Government of Rwanda has resulted in the formulation and approval of comprehensive water and sanitation sector policies and strategies which are now under implementation. The process offered an opportunity to align the sector policies with the national flagship policy document (such as EDPRS-II and Vision 2020) and the SDGs as well as to integrate emerging sector challenges, based on experiences and lessons learned since adoption of the previous sector policy. The process also contributed to increased sensitisation of key government ministries and agencies, district officials and development partners on major sector issues and hence further raised the profile of water and sanitation sector on the national agenda. The experience of Rwanda suggest that the effective planning of policy and strategy formulation process, strong government leadership and ownership and engagement of key stakeholders from the outset play a key role in enhancing the robustness of the water and sanitation policies and help expedite their approval. These experiences also offer useful lessons that can be used by countries aiming to develop new policies or strategies or update the existing, water and sanitation policies and strategies in view of changes in the context and emerging issues and/or to ensure alignment with SDGs.

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#### **Note**

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of Government of Rwanda or UNICEF.

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