



**Water - A Vital Wellspring
for Human Development**

**New Issues Paper for the Water Supply and
Sanitation Collaborative Council**

Rabat Meeting of the Council

7-10 September 1993

***Authors: Jack C.S. Ling, Int'l Communications Enhancement Centre, Tulane
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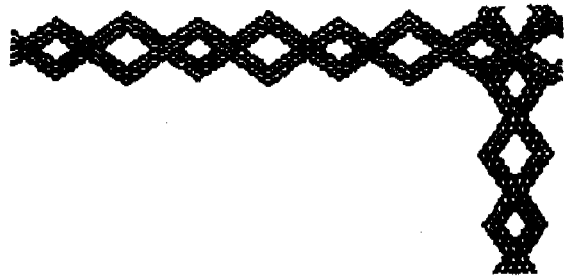
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RC: N 11173
LO: 71 WSSCC 93



Water - A Vital Wellspring
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Human Development

A case for advocacy

Jack C.S. Ling*
and
Cynthia Reader-Wilstein**

**This paper was prepared for the meeting of
the WSS Collaborative Council
in Rabat, Morocco, September 1993
with support from the IRC - International
Water and Sanitation Centre**



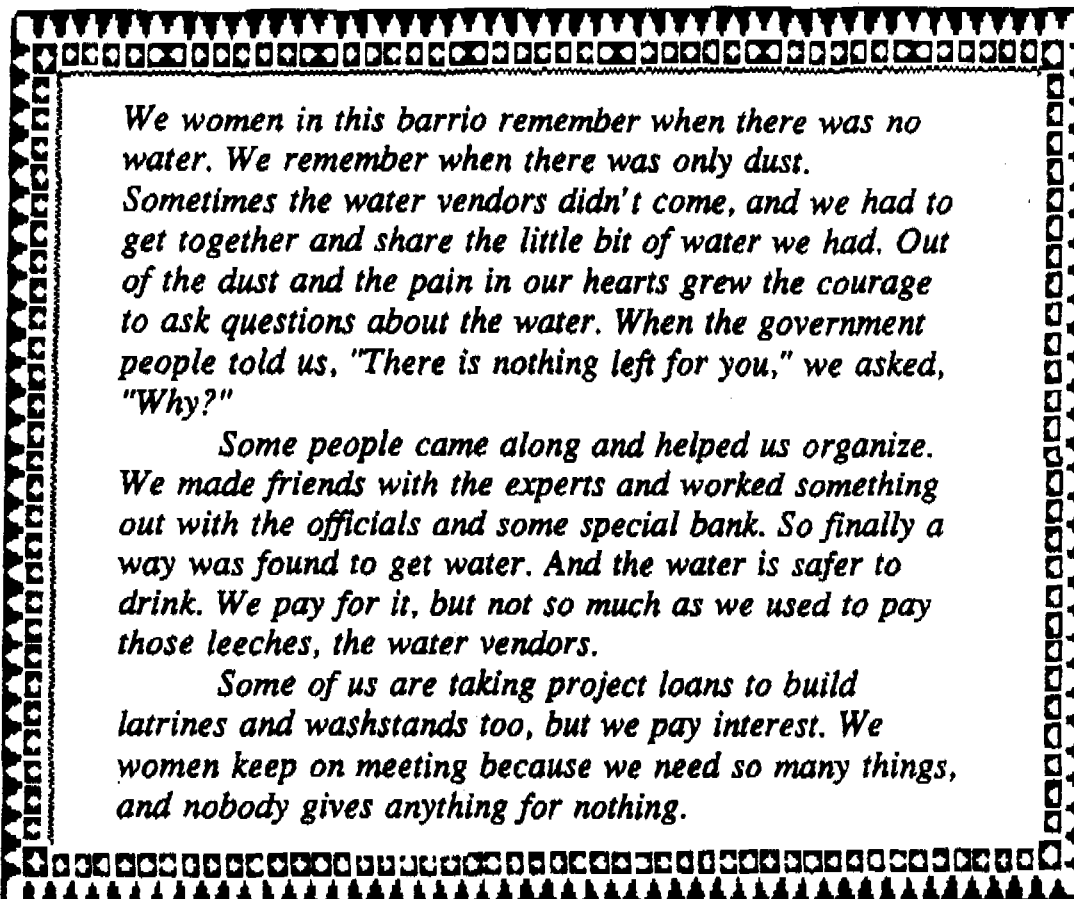
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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the following people for
their valuable contributions to this paper:

Ms. Diane Bendahmane (WASH), Mrs. Margaret Catley-Carlson (Chairperson of the
WSS Collaborative Council), Dr. Dennis Carrol (US-AID),
Mr. Brendan Doyle (UNICEF), Dr. Dennis Foote (ACT),
Mr. Gourisankar Ghosh (UNICEF), Mr. Tony Hewett (UNICEF),
Dr. Caroline O.N. Moser (World Bank), Ms. Vanessa Tobin (UNICEF).
Special thanks go to Mr. Hans van Damme (IRC), who shared the
ideas and results of the IEC-Working Group with us.

Water - A Vital Wellspring for Human Development



In barrios and shantytowns and in rural villages all over the world, 2.6 billion men, women, and children spend hours every day hauling water that is often polluted, or paying 30-40% of their incomes to have it trucked to them. They are the last ones on the list for water systems, and resources give out before they are reached.

Social and Economic Costs

Those living on the margins of society are agricultural, construction, and service workers. Their losses in time, nutrition, and health hurt family units, stunt community growth, and cripple national economies.

In Africa, labor used in gathering water is estimated at 40 billion hours valued at US\$ 2 billion a year. And in just ten weeks, a cholera epidemic in Peru cost US\$1 billion in agricultural export and tourism revenues. Three million children die every year from water-related diseases. And for future generations, the horrendous costs of a polluted environment caused by not managing water and wastes are incalculable.

During the 1980s the world coordinated its efforts to put an end to this social and economic damage. Attempts were made to involve communities, and there were laudable advances in the development of low-cost technology to extend water and sanitation coverage. Among all development programmes, water is now considered the only one for which costs are coming down.

Despite the significant successes of the Water Decade, global achievements fell short of expectations. Population and pollution increases played their parts, but it has also become clear that the community approach and appropriate technology were not used to their full potentials.

These inefficiencies must be overcome before the environment deteriorates to a state which becomes unmanageable. Water and sanitation provision for the unreached has to pick up speed. Programmes need to progress about three times faster for water and about four times faster for environmental sanitation. To do this costs must be halved and resources doubled.

Scarce Resources

Adding to the difficulty of this equation, the development dollar is shrinking. World-wide recession is causing donors to slash their budgets, even while resources are being stressed by the needs of Eastern Europe and emergency situations stemming from regional conflicts, civil strife, and natural calamities.

According to the World Bank, water and sanitation resources during the Water Decade actually dropped from an estimated yearly average of US\$ 14 billion from 1980-85 to around US\$ 9.3 (in 1985 dollars) during the second half of the Decade. This lower rate of investment has been attributed primarily to slow or negative growth in developing countries. For the past three years, commitments have remained stagnant at an estimated US\$10 billion a year despite inflation, with about two-thirds of that amount provided by developing countries and a third by external support agencies.

Many developing countries are experiencing the devastating effects of structural adjustment which has been a dominant political and economic force throughout the 1980s. Structural adjustment, emphasizing growth and production, has displaced poor farmers and created a greater disparity between rich and poor in terms of access to water and land. Therefore, not only are financial resources scarce, but the effects of those scarcities are endured primarily by the most vulnerable groups, especially women and children.

The Need for Advocacy

Right now, hard work is not enough to keep water resources and environmental sanitation from deteriorating. Strong advocacy is also indispensable. By fostering political commitment -- to reallocate resources, help communities organize, and raise new funds -- can programmes begin to reach the vast majority of those in greatest need. Recent studies demonstrate that if policy-makers and communities do everything they can to stretch available resources, it will still cost about US\$ 12 billion a year to reach 80% of the poor by the year 2000 -- 20% more money than is currently committed.

Because the appropriate technology does exist and well-informed planners do know how resources can be more equitably distributed, our humanity impels us to take action. If only key people knew about the critical nature of this situation -- and mobilized to take action. To make this happen, better communication and dialogue are required, ranging from political advocacy to community management.

Advocacy is a popular term for the process of making an issue stand out, getting people's attention, and changing minds. But advocacy is more than selling an idea. It searches for the higher ground and the common good. Therefore, in looking for support for water and environmental sanitation programmes, beware of referring to them as a "sector". That implies an isolated interest. This is not the time to stand alone. It's time to work with other groups. Advocacy for water and sanitation means building partnerships and alliances with the overall goal of human development.

Opportune Moment

Today, a number of converging developments present an opportune moment for water and environmental sanitation advocacy.

Primary Health Care

The Declaration at the historic 1978 Alma Ata conference defined the then radical notion of primary health care, is very relevant today. It is still the agreed model for almost all public health work in developing countries. Even in industrialized countries, growing concern about costs makes primary health care a new-found model for health care and a subject of widespread public interest.

One of the first principles of the primary health care concept is that the individual is responsible for his own health. In recent years, the Bamako Initiative, which has spread rapidly throughout West Africa, makes it evident that even poor communities are willing to raise their own resources for primary health care.

Health organizations are constantly looking for ways around their own bureaucracies to encourage people to help themselves, and primary health care supporters consider water and environmental sanitation together as one of eight essential elements of community development in the area of health. So agencies concerned with health and development are natural partners for water and sanitation activities.

Child Survival

The Child Survival movement, initiated by UNICEF and supported by WHO, demonstrated that concerted advocacy action played a key role in achieving really remarkable things. Immunization and oral rehydration were promoted with intense involvement of political leaders, health care workers, communities and every level of society. Immunization coverage reached the global goal of 80%, though not always sustained. And the use of ORT has saved millions of lives. This is an appropriate time for planners to consider: Yes, ORT is working. So now, how can we use advocacy to concentrate on removing the causes of water-related diseases?

A child may be weakened from many bouts of diarrhoea and succumb to another illness. So emphasis should be on prevention as well as cure.

The 1990 World Summit for Children gave water and sanitation a boost by recognizing its inherent importance to people and its potential to be sustained through strong community participation. As a result of this summit, governments of all developing countries have agreed on water and environmental sanitation as part of a human development package embodied in the Mid-Decade Goals. And almost all of these countries have prepared national plans of action in pursuit of these goals.

Use of advocacy to reach water and sanitation Mid-Decade Goals is evident in recent efforts in Nigeria, spearheaded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, to advance the eradication of guinea worm. On the financial front, the World Summit for Children has resulted in "Debt Relief for Children", a unique advocacy initiative to restructure the debt of developing countries so as to directly benefit rural and poor urban women and children. Commercial banks in industrialized countries have begun to respond to this opportunity by "swapping" hard currency debt for approximately US\$ 2 million in local currency expenditures for community-based water and sanitation programmes in the Sudan.

These successes prove that advocacy works. The experience of these successes now can be employed more systematically as part of a broad strategy for water and environmental sanitation with due emphasis on community management.

Rio Summit

The 1992 Rio Summit has led to a growing global concern for the environment and new political commitments in the areas of water and environmental sanitation. Agenda 21 gives a specific set of guidelines on issues affecting human relations with the environment including freshwater and waste management. The conference's outcome was fed by The Dublin Statement, with its guiding principles regarding the participatory approach, the role of women, and water's economic value.

Although the guidelines are non-binding, there is evidence that developing countries and donors are trying to demonstrate support for Agenda 21 items. Some developing countries have recently established ministries of the environment, and US-AID, for example, now places water and environmental sanitation at the centre of its new Environmental Health programme. The Netherlands Environment Minister will host a Ministerial Conference in 1994, to follow up on the Drinking Water and Sanitation component of Agenda 21.

Shifting Focus within Multilateral and Bilateral Agencies

Recently, UNDP and the World Bank have shifted their focus more toward human development. For the past three years, UNDP Human Development Reports have explored empowerment issues, and this year's World Bank Report is devoted to health, including water and environmental sanitation.

These organizations have raised questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of large-scale capital intensive projects, and are turning their attention to small, low-cost projects emphasizing self-help and managed by communities.

Concurrently, the viewpoint of some donor countries has been affected by the end of the cold war stalemate. They are now looking more at problems than politics, and see water as a serious problem closely associated with poverty and disease.

Water is also widely recognized as something which lies mostly within the traditional domain of women in developing countries. All development agencies today have an increased understanding and appreciation for the importance of women in development. This new level of concern translates into a powerful impetus for encouraging communities to organize so that the heavy burden of carrying water, which is borne mainly by women and girls, can be lifted or lightened.

Converging Interests

The field of water and environmental sanitation is in a good position to attract allies. Because water is so essential to life and because communities are willing to organize and help pay for it, water offers an important entry point for primary health care, child survival, women's role in development, environmental issues and economic initiatives.

All these converging interests present an opportune moment for water and environmental sanitation because supporters of those interests are coming to the conclusion that their efforts need strong community involvement to be sustainable. They also recognize that most development programmes don't have enough community involvement to make them sustainable. They can be convinced therefore that there is benefit in joining with water and sanitation efforts because water is one issue that can galvanize a community and prepare it to improve itself in other ways, including the hygienic use of water and disposal of wastes.

By building on water's importance and the strengths of water programmes at the community level, advocacy for water and environmental sanitation can take advantage of the readiness of natural allies and create the momentum to spur political commitments and financial support.

Since advocacy is based on building partnerships and alliances, this is an especially propitious time for water and environmental sanitation workers to make a leap forward -- and those other development interests can be tapped along the way.

How to Initiate Advocacy

Setting Goals

Advocacy has to be done systematically. It first requires agreement on specific operational goals or strategies derived, in this case, from Mid-Decade Goals of reducing the 1990-2000 sanitation gap by 10% and the safe water gap by 25%. These strategies are required because highlighting needs and creating a lot of programme visibility, without strategies for follow-up action, lead to the "fireworks syndrome". In the end, all you have is a dark sky.

The Delhi Statement provides a framework for setting specific operational goals to increase efficiency in the use of available funds and to mobilize additional funds. Advocacy can help in each of these areas by building the political commitment to reallocate resources, increase financial commitments, and find support for low-interest loans and debt restructuring.

Building Alliances

Once these goals are in place, the next step is to identify potential partners. If there are antagonists, find out why they are antagonistic and what can be done to get their support. Work with everyone connected with water and development, including legislative bodies, NGOs, industries, religious people, the media, and community and professional groups.

All these groups are important for political and financial support. Sometimes help comes from unexpected directions. For example, Rotary International gave tens of millions of dollars for universal immunization.

Audience Segmentation

The process of audience segmentation should be based on research, leading to the design of tailored messages. Saying "We need water and more money" doesn't build alliances. For each partner, learn why they are interested in water and environmental sanitation and in what circumstances. Speak to potential partners in terms of their own interests -- health, women's empowerment, economics. Speak to politicians in terms of the interests of their constituents and find common ground.

Messages

Messages are based on both quantitative and qualitative research. Technical data at international and national levels, down to provincial and community levels, is crucial to convince partners and policy-makers that investments in this area pay off at attractive rates of return. Project monitoring is part of this effort, and those who monitor should also have the communication expertise to produce clear cost comparisons. As a hypothetical example, a publication might be designed to show that countries spending US\$ 1000 on sanitation save US\$ 2000 in health costs. Leaders also need to know what economic loss can be attributed to lack of water and sanitation in their own country. This kind of research supports rational arguments.

To strengthen these positions, it is important to give surveys or "focus-group" research on how water is used and why it matters to people. By putting a human face on problems of water and sanitation, planners can help policy-makers visualize how benefits are derived and understand the process by which improvements in water and sanitation lead to human and economic development. People are moved to action by reason, emotion, clear understanding, and belief they are choosing the best path.

Media and Other Communication Channels

Once messages are designed, media and other channels of communication are chosen on the basis of what is appropriate, considering the preferences and characteristics of whoever's going to use the information. A celebrity spokesperson or goodwill ambassador can be effective in raising the general awareness of an issue, attracting media attention, and winning the support of national leaders. Effective interpersonal communication facilitates decisive action.

Whatever media products are used by goodwill ambassadors and others -- films, videos, slide sets, charts, publications -- should be developed and tested for their ability to get and hold attention, to be understood, and to elicit action. The general goal of advocacy is political commitment to human development, and the specific objective of advocacy is increased priority for water and sanitation. The measure of that commitment and that priority is the delivery of resources.

Opportunities for Advocacy

Successful water and environmental sanitation programmes hinge on strong community involvement. Therefore, the Commission for Sustainable Development is one logical forum for building an alliance. When people take an active role and don't rely on outside help, development is sustainable. Also, the use of low-cost technology in communities encourages the conservative use of freshwater.

Ministerial Conference in the Netherlands, March 1994

Certainly the Ministerial Conference on Drinking Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation in March of 1994 is a critical forum for advocacy. The Netherlands is hosting this conference, but Collaborative Council members can get advocacy on the road by making that conference the Alma Ata of water supply and environmental sanitation.

This conference is only six months away, so there is very little time left. Work must get started immediately to make the Ministerial Conference a focus of advocacy. And it must be ensured that it becomes part of a broad strategy and a continuing effort for a number of years. The meeting will form an unprecedented step in the water and sanitation effort and if ministers agree on goals and a plan of action, advocacy should be made part of it.

The Collaborative Council has the opportunity now to initiate effective advocacy action and particularly, to reckon with the managerial and financial aspects of raising awareness, commitments, and resources.

Role of Collaborative Council Members

International advocacy requires a focus -- an organizational base, staff and money. It will take time to develop this and it is important to make this a common effort.

Each Council member can make a start however, by taking a good look at his or her own organization.

The 1991 Human Development Report pointed out that only 8% of donor-country aid budgets went towards human development, along with an average of only 2% of developing country GNP. *Each agency should examine how their contribution to water and sanitation has fluctuated or may have been reduced by other priorities.*

Low-cost technology projects currently receive about 20% of available funds. Shifting some funds from high-cost to low-cost technology, in appropriate situations, could dramatically increase coverage of the most needy. *Consider what each organization can contribute to make distribution more equitable and effective.*

Acceptable coverage and sustained maintenance of water and sanitation improvements depend on community financing and management. These require continuing dialogue and working with communities to help them build the alliances they need to get their needs met. The Information, Education and Communication Working Group of the Council has raised the awareness among water and environmental sanitation professionals everywhere that good communication skills are critical to work with decision-makers as well as communities. *Each organization should examine its communication training and how seriously it takes communication within programmes.*

About 10% of water and sanitation resources should be devoted to advocacy and mobilization including research, message design, alliance formation and other elements. Advocacy which supports programme goals and unlocks resources is well worth the cost.

Council members will not be able to create a global movement by individual efforts alone. Collectively they can, once they have a focus of activity and technical resources.