

Raising visibility and voices of the urban poor

Civil society's engagement in urban water and sanitation reform – experiences from WaterAid country programmes

Introduction

This is the urban age. Since 2007, more people are living in cities than rural areas for the first time in human history. The rate of urbanisation is rapidly increasing in developing countries, where 85% of all urban growth is expected to take place in the next 30 years. Expansion of public services and infrastructure in urban slums often do not keep pace with population growth, and service providers frequently lack the managerial and operational autonomy, funding, and regulatory mechanisms to make them accountable for their performance.

Access to water and sanitation in urban settings is a growing challenge. People buy water at exorbitant rates from private vendors, adopt self-imposed rationing, or collect water from unreliable sources; posing significant health threats. The case for pro-poor reform of the urban water and sanitation sector has become acute.

This paper shares some notable successes that WaterAid and its partner organisations have achieved in collaborating with service providers and governments to improve inclusive service delivery in Africa and South Asia. The examples show how strategic and operational collaboration between civil society organisations, regulators, policy makers and service providers help to improve pro-poor performance of utilities through the expansion of access to the poor and/or marginalised, making service providers more accountable and opening up decision-making processes.

Bangladesh: Improving rights to services for slum dwellers in Dhaka

Approximately 25% of Bangladesh's population lives in urban areas. Until very recently, most cities did not permit households without legal



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entitlement to land, to access water supplies. In Dhaka, where 85% of the city's 14.8 million population lives in slums and squatter settlements, this meant that residents unable to demonstrate ownership of the land on which they resided, were not entitled to services by the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWASA).

In 1992, Dhaka-based non governmental organisation (NGO) Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK), a partner of WaterAid in Bangladesh, started to act as an intermediary between DWASA and the slum communities. DSK argued for the separation of access to water supply from ownership of land. It made security deposits to guarantee bill payments by the communities. As a result of this arrangement, DWASA approved two water points in poor areas of Dhaka in 1992 and 1994.

DSK subsequently developed this experience into a model for sustainable water supply for the urban poor, and negotiated with DWASA to carry out a pilot project of this model in 12 slum communities.

DSK worked with the communities to improve community capacity to manage water points, ensuring regular bill payments and full recovery of capital costs. In 2008, after 16 years of regular

payments of bills, a landmark agreement was secured with DWASA whereby Community Based Organisations (CBOs) were allowed to apply for water connections on their own behalf, without an intermediary.

Today, communities are respected customers of DWASA and the scheme is being rolled out across the country. Those previously excluded are now actively involved in the design and usage of water points and repayment schemes.

De-linking land tenure from rights to services ensured Dhaka's informal settlements' access to water supply. People living in poor communities demonstrated their reliability as clients to the service provider.

Pakistan: Mapping as a basis for sanitation

In Pakistan, rapid urbanisation and increased demand have led to deterioration in water and sanitation services in many of its cities, particularly in Karachi, which grew from 436,000 to 13 million inhabitants between 1941 and 2005. An estimated 73% of Karachi's population live in informal settlements, without official entitlement to services. Informal settlements often run parallel service delivery networks to meet the service gap.

The Orangi Pilot Project – Research and Training Institute (OPP-RTI), a partner of WaterAid in Pakistan, was established in 1980 to promote community self-help activities in Orangi – one of Karachi's 18 outlying towns. OPP-RTI developed a low-cost sanitation programme – the 'internal-external component sharing' model – in response to Orangi community's prioritisation of sanitation as their main problem. 'Internal components' are sewers and latrines developed at household, community and side street level. These are connected to the 'external components' – the main sewers and treatment plants financed and developed by the government. OPP-RTI develops and uses basic maps of sanitation infrastructure and sewage disposal patterns of a community as an advocacy tool. These maps reflect the reality

of inequality on the ground and makes informal settlements' needs visible. The maps are also used as an influencing tool to determine the allocation of resources.

By 2007, almost 100,000 households in Orangi had developed their own sanitation facilities which were connected to the external systems. Other CBOs and NGOs in Pakistan are replicating the model with 40,000 houses now having internal sanitation systems in other urban communities.

Most recently, the model was adopted as part of Pakistan's National Sanitation Policy. Today, Karachi sewerage agencies regularly use OPP-RTI maps to obtain information on informal settlements, and the OPP-RTI was recently invited to become part of a focal group on developing a city wide sewerage system based on the natural channels and drains of Karachi.

Close collaboration between OPP-RTI, the Karachi government and the major agencies responsible for sewerage and drainage resulted in more sustainable sanitation services not only for Orangi but for other similar communities elsewhere in Pakistan.

Malawi: Water supply management in Lilongwe's low income settlements

Prior to 2003, excessive connection costs, lack of transparency in billing, abuse of power and community trust by community leaders, vandalism of facilities and community disillusionment posed significant obstacles to ensuring sustainable access to safe water and sanitation services in low income neighbourhoods in Lilongwe. A partnership between the Lilongwe Water Board (LWB), the Centre for Community Organisation and Development (CCODE) and WaterAid in Malawi has helped to overcome several of these challenges through the introduction of effective kiosk management systems. Based on earlier experiences of Water Aid in working with low income communities in Lilongwe, WaterAid supported the LWB to establish a Kiosk

Management Unit. Initially hosted in the LWB, the unit has subsequently become an independent and self-sustaining entity.

To tackle the problem of misuse of water facilities in these areas, the CCODE and LWB engaged with communities in a participatory process to identify suitable kiosk management options, the preferred one of which was Management-by-Water Users Associations.

To date, six Water Users Associations have been established and the LWB has handed over all facilities and operations – including system maintenance and revenue collection – to the associations, resulting in a commendable improvement in billing and repayment of arrears.

Partnership between public/private utilities and civil society organisations is crucial to enhance efficiency in the delivery of water services to the poor. A dedicated unit, addressing pro-poor issues often unattended by the utility company, can help to improve revenue collection. The Lilongwe experience demonstrates that poor communities are able and willing to manage and pay for services they appreciate.

Ghana: Shukura initiates dialogue on water through community scorecard process

In 2009, a community scorecard exercise was conducted by the Community Network Initiative (COMNET) with funding from WaterAid in Ghana. The exercise provided residents with an opportunity to assess water services in Shukura, an urban low income community in the Accra Metropolitan Area, with a population of about 40,000. The community scorecard exercise is a citizen engagement tool that allows utility providers to receive an independent assessment of their operations from their customers. It promotes accountability and good governance. Following avid discussions of residents' perception of service quality between the stakeholders – the Ghana Water Company, AVRIL

(the operator) and Shukura community members, facilitated by the COMNET – the key findings were identified as irregular water supply, water rationing, poor water quality and inappropriate billing in the sense that it was not commensurate with services delivered.

The meeting acknowledged the need to improve the level of service to the Shukura area. In addition, illegal water connection was identified as an activity that affected supply to most households in Shukura. Community members agreed a reform agenda with the water company staff, which included setting up a community watchdog committee to monitor illegal actions.

Furthermore, AVRIL promised to improve its communications with the community and the local government representative (counsellor) promised to support the AVRIL team to map areas with burst pipes in an effort to minimise waste.

The Shukura scorecard exercise and dialogue enabled the utility to receive an independent assessment of their operations. It sets out the first steps towards promoting accountability and good governance.

Conclusion

As the global urban population continues to rise, it is essential that water and sanitation services keep pace with this growth. To ensure that service delivery is pro-poor, CSO involvement is vital. CSOs have the ability to act as an intermediary between informal settlement citizens, service providers and policy makers.

To obtain universal access to safe, accessible, and sustainable services, reforms need to include civil society to ensure that citizens' voices are heard and accounted for in the design of inclusive service delivery plans.

The case studies above demonstrate that partnerships between local NGOs, regulators, government authorities and utilities enable improved access of water and sanitation

services for poor and marginalised communities in a way that benefits utilities and a country's development aspirations. CSO engagement has helped to improve the capacity of service providers to deliver services, while increasing accountability of providers, ensuring services are paid for and broadening sector dialogue and decision-making processes. It is through these types of partnerships that a collective and mutually beneficial process can be established for all stakeholders involved.

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March 2010



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WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities.

Registered charity numbers 288701 (England and Wales) and SC039479 (Scotland)

Further reading

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