



Prioritise water and sanitation in PRSPs to reach the MDGs

Mary O'Connell, *WaterAid, UK*

ACCESS TO WATER and sanitation is a right, a basic need for survival, a requirement for reducing poverty and a driver of growth. Much of the suffering from a lack of access to water and sanitation is borne by the poor, those who live in degraded environments, and overwhelmingly by women and girls. The importance of water and sanitation has been recognised in the UN-mandated international Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve by 2015 the proportions of people without access to safe water and sanitation. Provision of these basic necessities makes possible the achievement of many other MDGs such as those on completing primary schooling, girls' education, under-five mortality, maternal mortality and improvement in slum dwellers' lives.

Access to water and sanitation underpins good health and consequent ability to attend school or to make a living. Presently a child dies every 15 seconds of a water-related disease while 40 billion working hours are lost to water-hauling in Africa alone. Surveys by the Tanzanian Government have found children 12% more likely to attend school if they live within 15 minutes of a drinking water source than if they live over one hour from such a source. A school sanitation programme in Bangladesh increased the enrolment of girls by 11%. Getting water and sanitation services to the poor is therefore an indispensable strategy for poverty reduction with the potential to function as a driver of growth. (1).

The water and sanitation MDGs require 2.2bn people (384,000 per day) to be served with sanitation and 1.5bn (280,000 per day) with water (statistics as above). (For comparison, during the 1990s 224,000 people each day received water and 205,000 sanitation.)

Financing Poverty Reduction Strategies

New international approaches to poverty reduction are reflected in developing countries' **Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)**. These were written following the establishment of a World Bank/IMF programme in September 1999 to develop nationally-owned, participatory poverty reduction strategies that provide the basis for all concessional lending and debt relief. PRSPs are matched by national-level medium term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs), in which poverty reduction priorities are clearly outlined. Essentially, PRSPs exist to prioritise national budget allocations in order to achieve poverty reduction objectives. In time PRSPs and MTEFs could become the basis for all donor assistance, which would be non-specified to any programme.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are based on the premises that development is a process of social transformation, poverty is multi-dimensional, faster growth is essential and participation will widen growth potentials. The PRSP process opens development planning and budgeting to slightly wider scrutiny and influence. If the principles of the process are adhered to, PRSPs could provide unprecedented opportunities for civil society organisations to influence national policy-making and development planning. It is imperative that social sector development actors use the opportunity to contribute their expertise in poverty reduction initiatives.

Supporters of PRSPs welcome the opportunity provided by their development for open debate on the determination of countries' development trajectories. They hope the development of the strategy papers will become the focal point for dialogue between NGOs, parliament, government and the international community on strategies for poverty reduction.

On the other hand, critics of PRSPs point out that the process will only deliver repackaged structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). They argue that PRSPs will increase IMF and World Bank control over 'not only financial and economic policies, but over every aspect and detail of all national policies and programmes'. Macro-economic policies are still not open to negotiation (as with SAPs before).

Why should WSS sector actors work to influence national financial frameworks?

The development of PRSPs presents an important opportunity for those working for water supply and sanitation (WSS) improvements, which historically have been poorly prioritised and inadequately funded by governments. PRSPs must be based on an analysis of the multiple causes of poverty and include target-integrated strategies on addressing these causes. These strategies include social sector programmes, actions to promote growth and capacity building, rural development, local infrastructure, increasing participation and good governance.

PRSPs present the critical challenge to the water sector of demonstrating the importance of WSS interventions to wider poverty reduction. It needs to be clear not only that the poor often suffer from lack of access to water and sanitation, but also how and what improvements in access directly reduce poverty.

For many years the water sector has been dominated by perspectives which emphasise the health impacts of WSS

Table 1. Water, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals

Millennium Goal	Directly Contributes	Indirectly Contributes
Poverty: to halve by 2015 the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than \$1/day	Water as a factor of production in agriculture, industry, many other types of economic activity- Investments in water infrastructure and services as a catalyst for local and regional development	Reduced vulnerability to water-related hazards reduces risks in investments and production Reduced ecosystems degradation boosts local-level sustainable development Improved health from better quality water increases productive capacities
Hunger: to halve by 2015 the proportion of the world's people who suffer from hunger	Water as a direct input into irrigation for expanded grain production Reliable water for subsistence agriculture, home gardens, livestock, tree crops Sustainable production of fish, crops and other foods gathered in common property resources	Ensure ecosystems integrity to maintain water flows to food production Reduced urban hunger by cheaper food grains from more reliable water supplies
Universal Primary Education: to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete primary schooling	Access to improved WSS services provides an enabling environment for both children & teachers to concentrate on educational activities	Improved school attendance from improved health and reduced water carrying burdens, especially for girls
Gender Equality: progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women should be demonstrated by ensuring that girls and boys have equal access to primary and secondary education	Reduced time and health burdens from improved water services lead to more balanced gender roles	Community-based organisations for water management improve social capital of women
Child Mortality: to reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the death rate for children under the age of five years	Improved quantities and quality of domestic water and sanitation & effective use of the services contributes to reducing morbidity and mortality factors for young children	Improved nutrition and food security reduces susceptibility to diseases
Maternal Mortality: to reduce by three-fourths, between 1990 and 2015, the rate of maternal mortality	Improved health and reduced labour burdens from water portage reduce mortality risks	Improved health and nutrition reduce susceptibility to anaemia and other conditions that affect maternal mortality
Major Diseases: to halve, by 2015, halted and begun to reverse: The spread of HIV/AIDS; The scourge of malaria and of other major diseases affecting humanity	Better water management reduces mosquito habitats and malaria incidence Reduced incidence of range of diseases where poor water management is a vector	Improved health and nutrition reduce susceptibility to HIV/AIDS and other major diseases
Environmental Sustainability: to stop the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water	Improved water management, including pollution control and sustainable levels of abstraction, key factors in maintaining ecosystems integrity Actions to ensure access to adequate and safe water for poor and poorly-served communities	Development of integrated management within river basins creates conditions where sustainable ecosystems management possible and upstream-downstream impacts are mitigated

interventions. However, as a growing body of literature has clearly shown (Nicol 2000 (3), WaterAid 2001 (4)) the interconnections between water and poverty extend far beyond health. The recent shift in sectoral focus away from health and towards the broader objective of poverty reduction represents an important advance, but there is still progress to be made in developing a more sophisticated understanding of the linkages between water and poverty.

The WSS sector needs to participate in developing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing PRSPs in order to present the case for the prioritisation of extending poor people's access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Water and poverty reduction strategies in sub-Saharan Africa

A broadening understanding of poverty within the WatSan sector has yet to be reflected in wider PRSP development, particularly in terms of process (sub-national development and participation of water sector institutions) and content (broader adoption of a sustainable livelihoods approach).

Research both by WaterAid/ODI and WSP-Africa emphasised that whilst water and sanitation concerns were frequently expressed during participatory poverty assessments undertaken as part of the PRSP process, these concerns have rarely been reflected in the interim or final

PRSPs themselves. There is a danger, therefore, that both a vital element in understanding the nature and causes of poverty – the status of poor people's access to safe water supply and environmental sanitation services – and a key instrument in addressing poverty reduction is being inadequately integrated or, worse still, left out altogether within the PRSP process.

Software vs. hardware

Failure to understand the multi-faceted relationship between the lack of access to water and poverty hinders acceptance of non-physical infrastructure interventions as essential components of a water strategy for poverty reduction. In fact, in spite of lessons from the past about the absolute necessity of approaches such as building community capacity to sustain and manage their water supply, none of the PRSPs investigated included these as strategies for poverty reduction. No resources are allocated to building this capacity and it is not included among the actions and targets to be monitored.

The use of PRSPs to reach the MDGs

In principle PRSPs provide an important opportunity to put WSS centre-stage in anti-poverty plans, thereby unlocking resources for the sector from both domestic governments and official development aid. A recent study by the World Bank found that WSS was the sector with the most potential for poverty reduction when incorporated into the PRSP development process (<http://www.worldbank.org/energy/energyweek/2002>). Yet, despite its great potential for reducing poverty, WSS tends to be given a relatively low priority in PRSPs.

Our responsibility as WSS sector actors concerned with poverty reduction and MDGs includes:

- contributing our knowledge, experience and opinions about the impact of safe water supply on poverty reduction
- lobbying for the prioritisation of water and sanitation in PRSPs to achieve the MDGs
- highlighting the importance of raising the profile of water and sanitation within the PRSPs in interactions with government officials in the sector
- building the capacity of government and communities to act as stewards of water resources, responsible for their maintenance

The PRSP framework could be used to develop national poverty strategies that prioritise WSS as an integral element of national development plans, linked to funds available through HIPC debt relief. If WSS remains a low priority in PRSPs then WSS initiatives in some of the world's poorest countries may continue to proceed in a marginalised, ad hoc and fragmented manner. PRSPs have a timeframe of three years so we can as sector actors work towards influencing future PRSPs.

WaterAid's approach

WaterAid believes that financing the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation is affordable and achievable, particularly if new investments are well targeted at providing services to the poor and presently unserved. Getting the finance to halve the proportions of people unserved with water or with sanitation by 2015 will require action on two levels:

Sector specific

- Prioritise water and sanitation within developing countries' spending plans
- Double aid and other spending on water and sanitation
- Provide sustainable services and target the poor through involving users in planning and financing
- Support the strengthening of public institutions in the water and sanitation sector
- Open dialogue between governments and their citizens on solutions to the deficiencies of water and sanitation service provision

Wider development agenda

- Reverse the decline in aid to Africa
- Overhaul the process for debt relief (HIPC) and cancel the debts of all sub-Saharan African countries within HIPC
- Build government capacity at all levels to monitor and drive progress

WaterAid urges all participants to actively engage in their national structures to press for water and sanitation interventions to be prioritised in PRSPs, especially for the poor. Services to the poor must be at the heart of all efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. To do this, acceptance of innovation, especially by communities and poor people themselves, open transparent processes for planning and monitoring, and a willingness to co-ordinate better, supported by funding for institutional capacity are in order.

References

- (1) WaterAid, Unison, Oxfam, One World Action, Tearfund. (2003). *Hitting the Targets. Recommendations to the G8 for delivery of the Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation.*
- (2) (Adapted from): John Soussan (Centre for Water Policy & Development, Leeds University) and Wouter Lincklaen Arriens (2003) *Poverty and Water Security*, Published by ADB Manila
- (3) Nicol, A., (2000) *A sustainable livelihoods approach to water projects: Issues for policy and Practice.* Working Paper 133, ODI, London
- (4) WaterAid (2001) *Looking Back. Impact of Water and Sanitation Projects.*

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