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# Integrating a new approach – the example of Self Supply

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*In the present climate of DRA and budget support, it is getting increasingly difficult to introduce new ideas. The temptation is to continue with 'business as usual', with little room for questioning its sustainability and effectiveness or exploring new approaches. The development of Self Supply is something which has happened naturally in many parts of the world. However, it has been slow to take off in Africa, even though standard community-based approaches are evidently not able to provide a strategy to fulfil rural water supply MDG targets for most countries by 2015. This paper looks at the process whereby Self Supply is becoming established, and how far this has progressed, in integrating a grass roots level demand into national strategies.*

## Background

In the environment of DRA, SWAP and Multi-Donor Budget Support, donors wish to respond to government demands, rather than drive the agenda, but if government has no concrete experience of a particular technology or strategy, why should they demand it? Self Supply is a case in point, as governments are generally not aware of what people are doing for themselves, nor of their potential .as investors in supply.

Observation of so-called 'un-improved' rural water supplies throughout Africa (Sutton 2004) has shown that the 'poorest of the poor' are actually investing millions of dollars into their own water supplies. This may be to bring the supply closer to their home (new traditional/ family wells, rainwater harvesting), to make it cleaner (well head protection), easier to lift (pulleys, windlasses, animal power, low cost pumps, submersibles), and safer (household or source water treatment). Such efforts (Self Supply) have proved more sustainable than conventional community supplies in times of stress (eg. Liberia (Smith 2004), Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe (NAC 2006), are easily replicable and can be incrementally improved as resources become available (often erratically and in small amounts in rural Africa).

The Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)) is supporting country initiatives through information exchange, proposals for funding and research. They therefore act as a catalyst in the process. It is a process which can be summarized in a set of steps, with a foundation of well developed partnerships and communication (see Box 1- modified from Sutton 2007).

### Box 1. The 6 P's - Steps towards self supply scaling up

- **Potential** – scope, demand, physical suitability, links and possible conflicts with government policy
- **Piloting** – testing out and demonstrating possible solutions, monitoring impact and user satisfaction/ lessons learnt
- **Package** – developing models relevant to geographic, socio-economic and political conditions
- **Policy and plans** – integration of Self Supply into policies and plans for scaling up
- **Promotion /partnerships** – a continuous advocacy and communications process with government, donors and NGOs to encourage assessment of relevance and effects on policies, budgets and plans.

## Establishing potential

This first step is essentially as much about creating awareness of a different approach as it is about gathering data. It has two parts. The first is now well developed by the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) and defines the need of new approaches to rural water supply. JMP statistics draw governments' attention to the fact that in very few sub-Saharan countries will MDG target coverage be reached at present rates of progress. This stimulus has already led to interest in Self Supply from the governments in several countries, including Uganda, Mali, Zambia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger and Sierra Leone.

The second part of potential is clearer definition of how rural populations are obtaining water at present where coverage with protected supplies is generally below 50%. Within this the aim is to define better the degree of private and communal ownership of supplies and the costs and sources of finance for supplies which people use. At the same time the reliability and quality of water are ascertained and the aspirations of users as to what improvements they would most like to carry out. The result is a body of data which is usually collectable either as part of normal inventory exercises, in health or water, or as a research element of SWAP. This can show what people are capable of doing for themselves, what supplies offer most risk, and what changes users see as giving them most benefit.

The first surprise is normally that rural people have done so much themselves, then that water is seldom as highly contaminated as was thought, and thirdly that people as individuals have a capacity and willingness to pay which is not found when considering communal facilities. It is usually assumed that if lots of people use a supply it is communal, but among traditional sources that is seldom so, underlining the availability of well-developed management systems (seldom employed in conventional community-based supplies). Establishing potential is therefore a useful first step in getting sector professionals to consider different ways of thinking about water supply, appreciating what capacity there is a household level to improve supply and how small private supplies could be viewed in terms of coverage and the MDG target. It also underlines that for users water is not just a domestic need, but offers increased possibilities of income generation and a return for any investment made. It puts economic benefit beside health, not as an after-thought and gives prominence to poverty alleviation (the ultimate MDG).

Systematic studies of potential have already been carried out in Uganda (Carter 2006), Mali (Maiga et al 2006), Zambia (UNICEF 2008), and Ethiopia (Task Force 2008), and reconnaissance level studies in Niger, Ghana, Senegal, Liberia and Sierra Leone (see RWSN website).

## Piloting

New ideas need demonstration, testing of their acceptability (to users and decision-makers) and development of different models for different circumstances. The study of potential indicates certain ways of moving forward but no-one will accept big changes without seeing what they mean on the ground. In Uganda (Carter et al 2008) , Mali and Zambia potential studies have already led to piloting , and in Ethiopia that is now planned by government. Small scale piloting is also planned by the Ministry of Health in Senegal.

Except in Uganda, piloting is still in its early stages. This stage is often relatively easy, being mainly a demonstration of what is technically possible. As such it does not usually require full cost covering by users, nor the development and training of the support infrastructure. In Uganda (Carter et al 2007) it indicated an important lesson, that user investment of as much as 50% may be possible in private supplies but is very difficult to organise successfully where the ownership is communal. Higher levels of cost recovery may be possible where micro-finance is included. In Uganda, Zambia and in Mali, improved supplies exhibited reduction in contamination, with the majority of supplies in Zambia and Mali having zero faecal coliform. The reduction in health risks, the levels of cost covering by householders and the copying of improvements by neighbours all help to show local administration and sector professionals that there is demand and there are benefits from the approach. It also gives them waterpoints to monitor so that they can consider what levels of improvement can count towards coverage, with and without household water treatment. Monitoring of impact and acceptability are important parts of piloting as they give an opportunity for further assessment of the relevance and potential of Self Supply within government policy and strategy and private sector marketing.

## Package development

When the findings from piloting are assessed, it is possible to develop options which fit different scenarios, and form a package supporting Self Supply. These options may be:

- technical options (eg. Rainwater harvesting where groundwater is scarce, household water treatment options, a ladder of source improvements etc)
- financial options (eg. zero subsidy, small scale subsidy in areas where community water supply is unlikely to be sustainable, credit/loan systems etc)
- private sector capacity building (eg training artisans, incentives/ information packs for traders to stock spares, water filters etc)

This package concept requires a big shift in thinking, from the idea of providing facilities (still retained in piloting) to one of 'creating an enabling environment'. It becomes necessary to start thinking in marketing terms and training needs and to establish financing mechanisms which consumers access themselves. They can then choose whether they are looking to build rainwater harvesting, purchase a water filter or improve or construct a well, but they need the information, skills, and materials to be available.

Mali, having piloted in seven districts, has reached a stage where it is planning the development of such packages, so that Self Supply can go to scale. The Ethiopian government, having decided that household level investment is a key element of Universal Access is planning the development of packages, but needs some piloting of options to decide what alternatives offer the best chances of success. The Ugandan government wishes to expand piloting further before developing a strategy for going to scale.

## Policy and plans

In order to go to scale nationally it is necessary for Self Supply to be incorporated into government policy and plans. The development of the rope pump illustrates how government may accept an idea, but not necessarily adopt it. In Mozambique for example, NGOs may encourage communities or households to invest in a low cost pump, and government accept that it is done, but they do not yet include the same technology in their own plans or count the water points towards coverage. To go to scale it is necessary that the strategy is promoted by government itself and incorporated it into their plans. This Ethiopia has done with Self Supply, reaching the top step, but then also seeing the need to go back to address the lower steps before rolling out a national programme.

Policy aspects with which governments are wrestling in considering Self Supply include:

- How to fit household investment into regulation, planning and subsidy frameworks and
- Whether to encourage lower steps in source improvement which significantly reduce risks but do not offer perfect technical solutions, and which are essential to reach higher levels incrementally

## Partnerships and promotion

Being a multi-disciplinary approach, embracing multiple uses of water, Self Supply needs to involve a variety of players, and the private sector. Much depends initially on the open-mindedness of individuals, with some interested to explore new avenues and others convinced that their solutions solve everything. If wide acceptance is to be achieved the process must go at a pace that allows regular evaluation by sceptics as well as the converted, and the involvement of both as much as possible.

Observing the experience of the first two steps, it has been found that some engineers feel that the concept may have something to offer and want to look further into it, while others feel it is a retrograde step which offers no technical challenge and imperfect solutions. In that incremental improvements imply early stages which may improve access to water but not good water quality, there may be initial rejection of the whole idea. However this is much less common with the health sector who see each step as a reduction in health risks, a key objective of public and environmental health. This sector also generally has extension staff set at community level who can promote Self Supply principles in both water and sanitation more easily than water sector staff who tend to be available at most at district level. Thus interest may first be kindled in the health sector (as in Mali and Senegal) , or in rural development (many development NGOs), and water supply professionals may wait to see results and assess demand. However in Ethiopia, Uganda and previously in Zambia it has been the water directorates which have led the way from the start. Early form of

partnerships and lead organizations needs to be flexible and depends very much on the situation found in each individual country, building on where interest is strongest.

In Ethiopia a National Task Force appointed by government is advising on the process, but elsewhere partnerships between government ministries, multi-lateral and NG organizations have grown up through establishment of interest groups at local or national levels, to help guide research, design piloting, monitor results and lead national and regional workshops. These act as channels for advocacy, raising awareness among colleagues, other government departments, and especially local government. Participating organizations such as RWSN with its coalition partners WaterAid, WSP and UNICEF help provide research capacity where government asks for assistance, arrange exchange visits and disseminate results internationally.

## Conclusions

A set of logical steps are developing for building consensus and resources for integrating Self Supply into rural water supply strategies. Several countries have expressed interest in the concept, and begun to test out its relevance to their situations. They have usually done this through incorporation of studies into research or inventory components of SWAP. Conviction usually comes with increased awareness of what people are doing for themselves, but developing suitable packages for each situation takes time and requires well-monitored piloting. It is hindered mainly by uncertainties in how to relate to the large scale subsidies given to community water supply, how to treat private ownership and incorporate household level response into planning, monitoring and regulation. As a household level initiative, which reduces risks incrementally and encourages productive use for better nutrition and a return on investment made, it is sometimes ministries of health which take up the idea first, and carry out studies of potential. However it is directorates of water which need to integrate the idea into their policies and planning for successful scaling up and so dialogue needs to be good between the two, especially where the water sector initially feels that Self Supply only offers them a backward step.

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