

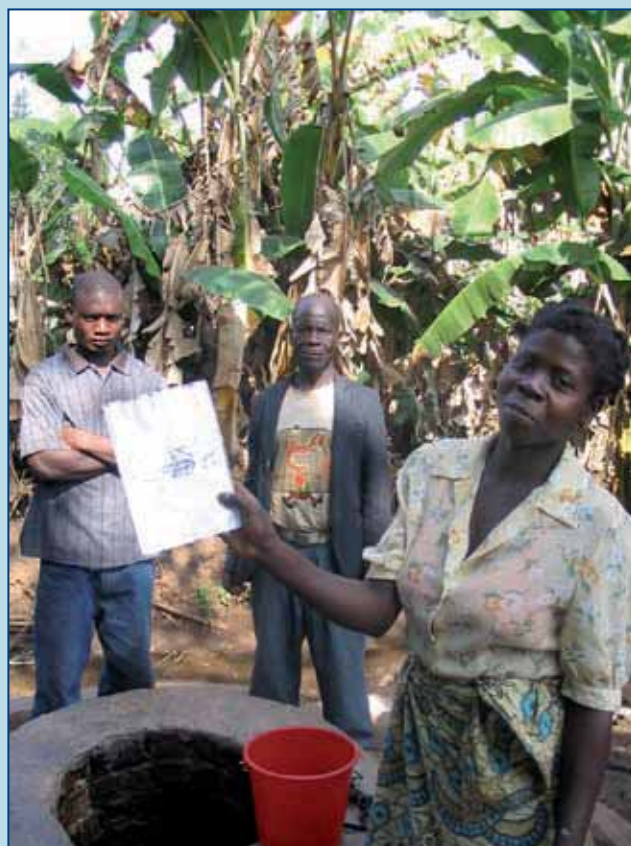
This briefing and guidance was inspired by the Symposium “Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation: Strengthening Capacity for Local Governance” organised by IRC and UNESCO-IHE in Delft, the Netherlands, from September 26-28, 2006. Background papers from the symposium are available online at <http://www.irc.nl/capacitydevelopment>

Strengthening Capacity for Local WASH Governance

Target 10 of the Millennium Development Goals – to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation – is a global capacity challenge. How can services be scaled up for millions of people? How can they be made sustainable? This challenge is being addressed in an era where responsibility for water, sanitation and other essential services is being decentralised to regions, districts or municipalities with the aim of making services responsive to communities.

However, the process is slow and patchy, especially when responsibilities are transferred without resources, mandates and competencies.

This briefing looks at ways that these decentralised bodies can be strengthened to carry out their new functions better, so that people gain access to safe water and sanitation services.



• *The transfer of competence from central to local governments without corresponding technical resources and capacity compromises the establishment and functionality of transparent and accountable processes.* •

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, WaterAid, Ghana

Governance at the intermediate level – taking responsibility for sustainable services



The intermediate level functions include overseeing, planning and delivering water and sanitation services, and monitoring and supporting them. At this level decisions are taken about constructing facilities, service structures, maintenance, spare parts supply, community support, building the knowledge base and accountability to communities and national level bodies. Organisations active at the intermediate level include national agency outposts at provincial level, district, municipal and other local government, the medium to small private sector, user groups, cooperatives, federations, NGOs and resource centres.

Local government at regional, district or municipal level has the legal mandate to ensure that water and sanitation services are delivered and supported.

Local governance embraces a wider range of organisations, both local government and beyond. Services may be delivered by local government, the private sector, NGOs, community organisations, local cooperatives, universities, training institutes etc.



In a decentralised setting, many organisations have critical functions at the *intermediate level*, in the middle between national and community level.

The intermediate level is crucial to translating national strategies into sustainable services, and to supporting small-scale service providers and communities. Without governance at this level, water and sanitation services fail to reach communities and remain unsustainable.

The critical functions are:

- *governance* of services and service providers,
- *support* for service providers to function effectively.

Governance is about taking responsibility for comprehensive and sustainable water and sanitation services for an area or population – identifying needs, making strategic decisions, allocating resources, setting tariffs, monitoring services, keeping national bodies advised, and communicating effectively with providers and communities. Under good governance, decisions about resources and services are:

- open and transparent
- equitable and inclusive
- efficient, demand responsive
- coherent and integrated
- ethical and accountable
- sustainable

Support for service providers includes technical assistance and advice, facilitation and capacity development, financing support and conflict mediation, especially for smaller service providers in rural areas and small towns.

◦ *Organisations working at the intermediate level have a crucial governance role in ensuring that women, men and children have appropriate access to water supply and sanitation in an equitable manner.* ◦

Gaining Insight into Capacity Development at the Intermediate Level, 2006

Strengthening capacity – how organisations and people function in their environment

Capacity can be defined as the ability of individuals, organisations and societies to perform functions, solve problems and to set and achieve goals. Capacity is about the ability of organisations and people to function in their environment. It emerges from a process of learning and development.

Institutional capacity

Institutional capacity is about mandates and the “rules of the game”. It establishes who does what, and to what standards. Institutional development is not about new bodies, but about creating confidence in rules, structures, finance and systems of accountability. Change becomes ‘institutionalised’ when it is a settled part of sector culture and practice.

Organisational capacity

A well-functioning organisation fulfils its mandates and meets its obligations. An organisation’s capacity rests on its structure, methods of functioning and on its decision making processes, as well as the skills and values of its staff. It is attuned to learning, transparent in its working and effective in its communication. It makes itself accountable, and involves communities in decision-making and monitoring. Organisations require resources to function with credibility.

Individual or human resources capacity

People in organisations with functions at intermediate level need skills in planning, engineering, financial supervision, communication and audit. Staff requires training to improve quality, to keep up with changing roles and technologies and to improve their ability to communicate. They need opportunities to share experiences and to reflect on challenges, success and failure.

Capacity development in institutional, organisational, and human resources is interlinked. For example, retaining skilled staff is partly due to their motivation and training as individuals, but also a factor of how their organisations function and resource them and of institutional factors that set the environment in which they work.



“Capacity development is fundamentally about change and transformation – individual, organisation and societal. While it is purposeful in its orientation, it is not likely to be linear, easy or free of conflict. It is also about values – whose capacity is to be developed, for what purpose? Finally, capacity development relies, in large measure, on learning and adapting behaviour, which requires openness to the lessons of experience, and the flexibility to modify approaches as required.”

Joe Bolger: Capacity Development: Why, What and How

Over the past 50 years, UNESCO-IHE has supported 13,000 water professionals from 162 countries to achieve a postgraduate qualification. These professionals return to their countries and 87% are still working in the sector 10 years after their return. However, UNESCO-IHE estimates that to achieve the water and sanitation MDG target, there is a need to triple the number of water professionals in Africa, double the number in Asia and raise the number by half in Latin America.

Update, UNESCO-IHE newsletter, November 2006

“Since the roles and responsibilities only become clearer during the process of decentralisation, ...there is a continuous need to readjust the capacity development programme.”
Leonie Postma SNV Angola

• *Capacity is that emergent combination of attributes, assets, capabilities, and relationships that enables a human system to perform, survive and self-renew.* •

European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2006

Capacity challenges for good governance



"I was involved in training district water and sanitation teams that monitor the performance of water and sanitation committees and boards responsible for managing water in small town schemes. They thought we were training the wrong people and should be training the chief executive and district planning officer to provide them with the logistics. You can't just train people; you also have to look at the environment."

Bernard Akanbang, TREND, Ghana

"The transfer of competence from central to local governments without corresponding technical resources and capacity compromises the establishment and functionality of transparent and accountable processes. If this persists, as is happening in a number of African countries, decision making prerogatives will continue to hang at the central and middle levels."

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, WaterAid, Ghana

"The problem is to make this vast amount of knowledge usable, to distribute it and to combine theoretical knowledge with the wisdom of individuals and communities, and pump it back into day to day life. You cannot do this without capacity building at the intermediate level. That is why we have international resource centres of knowledge in the field of water and sanitation."

Lodewijk de Waal, Chair of IRC Board

Making decentralisation work

Decentralised authorities at district or municipal level are supposed to take over mandates and resources. But national or regional bodies often hold on to functions and skilled staff. This blurs mandates and puts obstacles in the way of effective governance. Decentralised bodies are short of resources and staff, and find it difficult to build a store of knowledge and experience. Many problems have their roots in dysfunctional decentralisation and this needs to be addressed.

A learning culture in the sector

Unlearned lessons have a high cost. A learning culture is needed to give key actors information about services, where gaps need filling, and the best ways to fill them.

Resource centres can:

- Build networks of stakeholders, from public and private sectors and civil society to share information and improve capacity to absorb and use information
- Reassess the sector; its needs and actors
- Promote the importance of quality information in the sector and encourage donors and governments to allocate money for this.

Resource Centres help the sector to function with better information and intelligence. For example:

- CREPA, West Africa, provides training on water financing.
- The RC network in Tanzania answers questions about water issues by sending a text message to people's mobile phones.
- NETWAS in Kenya raised school sanitation on the national agenda using videos, fact sheets and other tools.
- WESNET in Pakistan helped sector professionals to communicate and work after the earthquake struck.

◦ *In India the critical challenge is to develop effective decentralisation below the State level and build capacity in them.* ◦

M. Govinda Rao, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy

Capacity challenges for good governance



Citizens' empowerment and accountability

To become accountable to users, governance bodies need to seek out and listen to local voices and to develop means for communities to become involved in monitoring and audit. A partnership approach with communities will reveal the true demand for services and enables the people who use services to monitor quality and access, including affordability.

NGO and donor coordination

Basket funding and sector wide approaches are designed to prevent fragmented development, and to ensure that financial resources are matched to areas of greatest need. If capacity is weak in intermediate level organisations, donors and NGOs may bypass these structures and adopt parallel structures for needs assessment, delivery and monitoring.

They may introduce technology which does not have a support infrastructure in an area. Donors and projects may also attract staff from local governance bodies.

Corruption

It is estimated that 20%-40% of financial resources are lost to the water sector through corruption or dishonesty.

Decentralisation is designed to make local government more accountable, but unless organisations engage with communities and function effectively, corruption can become endemic. Making clear and simple information about plans, costs and finances widely available helps to tackle corruption as communities know what they should be receiving, and at what price.

WaterAid West Africa worked with 29 local government bodies in six African countries – Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mauritania – to develop transparent and accountable mechanisms for decentralised service delivery and decision making, and to recognise local voices.

- *In Mali, Local Development Plans brought civil society groups into planning and helped to build trust between local government and communities.*
- *In Ghana, citizen-led Watsan mapping was employed with community scorecards for social audit and monitoring to increase public accountability.*

“Citizens have yet to develop a strong voice, to engage with service providers. If citizens develop a voice they will ensure that they deliver on their promises. That is why accountability is fundamental.”

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, WaterAid Ghana

In Kerala, India, a community and NGO sanitation programme worked to prevent corruption by improving community knowledge, ensuring that latrines were built to cost, and introducing local control over tendering and monitoring. The programme reached 200,000 families and reduced construction costs by 50–75%.

Kathleen Shordt, IRC, the Netherlands

• *Community management is heavily reliant on a supportive framework. Many communities lack the capacity to provide necessary support for technical design and supervision, facilitation and management, long-term training, legal issues, auditing, monitoring and evaluation*

Planning Commission, India

Country level approaches to strengthening capacity



Public-Public partnership

Stockholm Vatten in Sweden supported publicly owned water supply and sanitation operators in Kaunas, Lithuania, and Riga, Latvia, to restructure. They have become autonomous, self-financing, self-governing companies able to function without subsidy. The programme covered organisational change, human resource development and financial, operational and environmental performance. Kaunas and Riga water companies now implement major investment projects without outside assistance. Twinning arrangements require institutions to make a long term commitment and to gain a good understanding of cultural settings.

Giving user groups a voice

NEWAH and WaterAid Nepal encouraged community water user groups in Nepal to form a national federation, FEDAWASUN, to improve local governance.

FEDAWASUN has become "a lead organisation of the drinking water and sanitation users' organisations throughout the country", with networks in 23 districts and more than 750 user groups representing 50,000 households. Part of the mission is to "advocate for access to policy framing and decision making process and its achievement based on inclusive participation".

FEDAWASUN engages with water and sanitation bodies and service providers and protects user rights by monitoring service performance, coordinating local sector policy hearings, and disseminating information. FEDAWASUN is involved in a Citizens Action project to collect users' voices in rural districts.



A strategic approach to strengthening capacity

Strengthening capacity means more than training. Service development at local level is a factor of skilled, motivated staff, organisational capacity, including resources, and the laws and policies that contribute to the sector environment.

- North West Frontier Province, Pakistan, is strengthening Tehsil Municipal Administrations (TMAs) which have responsibility for water and sanitation, to clarify funding flows and responsibilities, improve staff knowledge and understanding and boost citizen participation. The Provincial government is making new rules and bylaws to address duplication, co-ordinate stakeholders and work for a sector vision, with clarity of "functions, funds and functionaries".
- In Peru there has been a ten year national debate about a new legal framework for water, but none of the 18 laws proposed have been enacted. In Celendin, a multi use water scheme won the support of local communities. But national criteria prevented a drinking water supply being shared for irrigation despite the benefit for livelihoods.
- In Angola, Departamento Provincial de Agua de Huila (DPA Huila) has functioned as a provincial water department since the early 1990s around the Southern provincial capital Lubango. Huila has decentralised roles and responsibilities to Municipal Water Brigades (MWBs), Municipal Administrators and community water and sanitation groups. DPA staff (with support from SNV, the Netherlands Development Organisation) are passing on knowledge and expertise to MWBs, and reviewing roles, responsibilities and financial arrangements. Attention is being paid to municipal and community involvement, monitoring and support systems and an inventory of water points.

◦ We reach out to support joint learning and sharing of experiences through our people-to-people learning initiatives, which brings municipal officials and councillors together with learning overt on the agenda. We call these learning journeys. ◦

Ndala Duma, Water Information Network, South Africa

Capacity development across the sector – the learning alliances approach

Learning alliances seek local solutions through action research

Many organisations responsible for governance and service delivery function in an institutional vacuum, failing to engage effectively with communities or with national policy makers. Water and sanitation programmes are less effective since evidence of what works and why is never collected or analysed.

A learning alliance brings together stakeholders to find effective local solutions, by conducting action research and bringing positive results quickly into widespread use. Stakeholders learn from real world experiences, address problems and conflicts of interest and implement programmes. The 'platforms' where they meet can be existing bodies, which are reinvigorated and expanded to bring all key partners together.

Learning alliances combine joint learning with joint action, and members act both as learners and experts. In this way, they accelerate capacity development and institutionalise a culture of learning and participation. By connecting learning platforms at intermediate level with those at national and community level, knowledge and learning can spread vertically, as well as horizontally.

Focus on acute problems and greatest opportunities

Learning alliances help to:

- Focus on most acute problems and greatest opportunities,
- Conduct action research in an alliance of practitioners, researchers, policy makers and community based advocates,
- Replicate innovation at scale with greater impact,
- Reduce the time taken to scale up successful initiatives,
- Develop locally appropriate solutions.

The learning alliance approach is new in the water and sanitation sector, but the underlying elements are not. The Masibambane ("let's work together") sector wide approach in South Africa, created partnership approaches with linked platforms to tackle a huge service backlog and created the Water Information Network to advance the creation and use of relevant information in the sector.



Dynamic processes for complex situations

In Benin, municipalities are the "maître d'oeuvre" at the heart of the national strategy to decentralise rural water supply and the MDGs. However, the transfer of power from state and departmental levels has been a major hurdle. SNV is working in Benin with a Systemic and Action-Research Approach (SARA) based on bringing together all concerned actors including national decision makers, and facilitating an iterative process of change. With support from a facilitator, three circles have been established:

- *Core Group – this includes departmental directors, mayors and representatives of civil society and the private sector. Together they tackle problematic areas, with visits to resource persons, institutions, experts, etc.*
- *Peer Group – other concerned actors act as a monitoring group and analyse results and recommendations from the core group.*
- *Circle of Influence – senior people from Ministries and International NGOs ask questions and help to validate results and spread innovation.*

This is an iterative process in which results and recommendations are identified and adapted. It uses group effects rather than relying on individual efforts.

• A learning alliance can become an engine for scaling up innovation and empowerment and to replicate good experiences, adapting them to local contexts. The result is greater effectiveness. •

International Symposium on Learning Alliances, Delft, June 2005



Material for this briefing note was presented at the Symposium Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation: Strengthening Capacity for Local Governance, organised by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, and UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, in Delft from 26-28 September, 2006.

The Background Paper "Gaining Insight into Capacity Development at the Intermediate Level" Edited by Jan Teun Visscher, Erma Uytewaal, Joep Verhagen, Carmen da Silva Wells and Marieke Adank, and other papers from the Symposium, are at <http://www.irc.nl/capacitydevelopment>

Presentations from the Symposium can also be accessed, along with case studies from Bangladesh, Colombia, Ghana and Uganda.

You can download and listen to (or read a transcript of) short audio interviews conducted at the Symposium with Sascha de Graaf.

Photos in this briefing note by: Petra Brussee, Jabu Masondo, Leonie Postma, Christine Sijbesma, Stef Smits, Ton Schouten, and UNICEF Zambia.

Recommendations

- 1 Governments need to give leadership for capacity development, and identify lead agencies to support it. National and intermediate level organisations can develop plans and budgets for capacity development as an integrated part of their programmes.
- 2 Governments need to ensure that external support for capacity development fits national policies and strategies and responds to local governance priorities and methods of working. Needs assessment and monitoring systems should support capacity development for the sector, not just for a project.
- 3 Organisations with mandates at intermediate level should come together to discuss joint needs for strengthening capacity. Local government needs to recognise governance as its central role, starting with an assessment of the current state of services, infrastructure and needs. Local government and other organisations need training, organisational strengthening and resources.
- 4 Capacity development should build on what already exists within countries, strengthening existing institutions and structures rather than building new ones. All stakeholders should be involved in planning capacity development strategies.
- 5 Resource centres, universities, training institutes and consultancy firms have a major role to play in training water professionals and in organisational and institutional capacity development. They need their own capacity to be raised so that they can anticipate and respond to the demands of the sector
- 6 More research is needed to demonstrate the real costs and the impact of capacity development. International and external support organisations, like IRC, can provide a focus for these issues and advocate internationally for sources of funding.
- 7 Knowledge based organisations, like IRC internationally and resource centres within countries, need to develop and disseminate evidence of effective methodologies for monitoring and evaluation, and share good experiences of capacity development approaches within and between countries.
- 8 Donors should allocate a percentage of contributions for capacity development. With knowledge based organisations, they have a catalytic role in institutionalising capacity development in the sector. This also requires governments and donors to allocate funds for sharing information and developing useful sector knowledge.