

Water Action Plan

A DFID policy paper

March 2004

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1. Summary

1.1 DFID's target strategy paper¹ on water states that:

- i) Access to water is vital if we are to make progress towards all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- ii) The focus of DFID's efforts should be on the links between water and poverty, and recognise that different poor people have different needs.
- iii) National governments must lead the way and our efforts must contribute to and be guided by their Poverty Reduction Strategies.

1.2 This Action Plan describes how DFID will take forward its commitments in water and sanitation and continue to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in a way that recognises that such efforts are most effective when they support developing country governments' own plans. The main elements are:

- i) Making sure water issues figure prominently in policy discussions with our main partner countries.
- ii) Providing evidence of the links between improved water supply and achieving all the MDGs, and ensuring that we are making use of this evidence in our policy dialogue.
- iii) Improving the way the international system works. We will focus our support on a smaller number of key international partnerships and networks, particularly those that can improve co-ordination in the water sector.

¹ DFID 2001, *Addressing the Water Crisis: healthier and more productive lives for poor people*.

2. The challenge

2.1 Over one billion people do not have access to safe drinking water. Over two billion lack adequate sanitation. Hundreds of millions of people live in areas where there is an overall and increasing shortage of water. Polluted ecosystems and poor water management have a detrimental effect on the health and livelihoods of poor people, and on economic growth. The importance of tackling these challenges is why there are three internationally agreed targets for doing something about them:

By 2015, reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water measured by the proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source. (MDG 7, Target 10).

Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation. (Agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), 2002).

All countries to develop Integrated Water Resource Management and Water Efficiency Plans by 2005, with support to developing countries. (Agreed at WSSD 2002).

2.2 Delivering cleaner water, better sanitation, and deciding between the different demands for the use of water are worth doing for their own sake. But they will also help achieve other important goals. 1.7 million people die each year and many more fall ill because they don't have access to clean water or adequate sanitation.² Some countries have particular problems, for example high levels of arsenic and fluoride in groundwater. These are a threat to the health of poor people. Cleaner water and better sanitation also help to control other diseases such as trachoma, worms and dengue. Women and girls bear much of the burden of collecting and managing water in the home. Better water supplies can immediately reduce this burden and help, for example, more girls to go to school. Economic growth depends on the sustainable management of water resources. More efficient use of water for agriculture (the largest water consumer) boosts food production, reduces hunger, promotes growth and enables more of this vital resource to be available for other important uses, both domestic and industrial.

² DFID 2003: Health Environment and the Burden of Disease: A Guidance Note.

3. The evidence

3.1 Sustainable access to safe water is one of the key indicators of international development. It is a basic service and major development priority for poor people. Improving

access to safe water and sanitation and improved water resource management are key steps to achieving many of the other MDGs, including some of the more challenging goals on reducing infant mortality and improving maternal health. The ways in which these are linked are set out in Box 1.

Box 1: Links between water and other MDGs

Development goal	Link to water and sanitation
Eradication of poverty and hunger	A lack of water resource management, unsafe drinking water and lack of sanitation are key links in the cycle of food insecurity, poor growth, disease, malnutrition and poverty. Irrigated agriculture provides a large proportion of the world's food and irrigation comprises over 70% of overall water use.
Universal primary education	Diarrhoeal diseases and parasites reduce attendance and attention. Girls often stay away from school unless there are female-only latrines. Time spent collecting water takes precedence over school attendance and this burden falls on girls. Teachers are unwilling to live in areas without adequate water and sanitation.
Promotion of gender equality	Women bear the brunt of poor health and the security risks from lack of private sanitation or washing facilities, and the burden of carrying water. Increasing women's roles in decision-making to match their responsibilities, and bringing about a more equitable division of labour are known to help improve water supply, sanitation and hygiene. Demonstrating this can help to improve women's status in other ways.
Reduced child mortality	Diarrhoea causes 2 million deaths per year mostly amongst children.
Improved maternal health	A healthy pregnancy and hygienic labour practices reduce the risk of maternal illness. Hand washing is simple, yet effective.
Combating disease: (HIV, malaria and others)	Of the global burden of disease, 23% is a result of poor environmental health, 75% of which is attributable to diarrhoea. HIV treatment is more effective where clean water and food are available. HIV infected mothers require clean water to make formula milk. Water management reduces opportunities for malaria mosquito breeding sites. Clean water and hygiene are important in reducing a range of parasites including trachoma and guinea worm.
Environmental sustainability	Water resource management is key to environmental sustainability. Water resources are under stress. Public health improvements can address the environmental degradation resulting from urbanisation.
Global partnerships for development	Public, private and civil society partnerships help deliver water and sanitation services to the poor.

4. Progress

4.1 Despite the impact that more and cleaner water and better sanitation can have on poor people, the issue does not always receive the attention it deserves. While in South and East Asia looking at the region as a whole the water target may be met, significant challenges remain at a sub-regional level. At current rates of progress, in sub-Saharan Africa the water target will not be reached before 2050. There is a lack of reliable information but the available data³ indicates that only eight (out of 44) countries are on track to achieve the water target. The sanitation target will be even more difficult to achieve.

What is the problem?

4.2 Why is progress so slow? Water and sanitation are consistently among the top three or four priorities of poor people in most countries. However, the importance that poor people place on cleaner water and better sanitation does not always result in action by governments. One sign of this was the low priority given to water and sanitation in the first generation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). However, things are improving, which is encouraging. More attention is being given to water and sanitation in the implementation plans for some PRSPs. The challenge is to spread this good practice more widely.

Box 2: Traditional water and sanitation projects: Lessons learned

Maharashtra Water Supply Project

In India, DFID supported a rural piped water supply programme in the State of Maharashtra. The programme provided improved water supplies in 200 villages. However, Maharashtra suffers from unregulated abstracting of groundwater for irrigation and industrial use. The artificially low price of electricity encourages the large-scale abstraction of groundwater by large-scale users. As a result, at times of peak demand, the river the scheme drew its water from ran dry. The poorest and most vulnerable people lost their supply of piped water.

A second phase of the programme is now being planned by the Government of India and the World Bank. It will seek to improve policy on water resource management, and help local authorities to implement it.

This project's problems stemmed from its failure to achieve objective three. Sustained and widespread benefits will depend upon achieving objective four.

Uganda: Busoga Trust Project – donor coordination

In 1997 DFID supported a water and sanitation project submitted by a local organisation, the Busoga Trust. The hand pump technology preferred by the Busoga Trust was the Consallen, a British manufactured hand pump. The Danish funded Eastern Uganda Rural Water and Sanitation (RUWASA) project was being implemented in a number of districts at the same time. The Danish project was instrumental in developing the locally manufactured U2 hand pump, later to be adopted as the national standard.

The Uganda Water Policy was being developed during the early stages of the Busoga Trust project and therefore the U2 was not yet officially adopted as the national standard. However, because of different technology types being promoted, and the need to import spares for the Consallen pump, spare part availability later became a problem. In 1999 the Government of Uganda adopted the locally manufactured U2 as the national standard.

This project achieved objective one, and partly achieved objective two. Its sustainability will depend on achieving objective four. This example also demonstrates the importance of donors operating within a single framework and to standards that are set by government.

DFID support for the water and sanitation sector in Uganda is now provided through general budget support. In addition, there is a £5m programme of technical assistance focused on helping Government to achieve their targets as set out in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan.

3 UNDP 2002: Human Development Report

4.3 Improving water resource management and speeding up progress on improving access to water supply and sanitation can be difficult because responsibility for water resource management, water supplies and sanitation tends to be spread across many different parts of developing country governments. No single part of government is in the lead, unlike for health and education; and different parts of government may have conflicting views. Ministries of agriculture are interested in water being used for irrigation and food production. Others favour drinking water supply and sanitation. If the former prevail, water tables can drop to below that which can be reached with hand pumps. The needs for hydropower generation often come into conflict with the needs of irrigated agriculture and can threaten the environment. Power stations that are poorly sited and managed can pollute groundwater. The different and growing demands for water at local, regional, national and international levels can develop into conflict. This is especially true for poorly managed aquifers and rivers.

4.4 These are complex problems. Solving them demands:

- i) well-designed infrastructure;
- ii) effective systems for managing and maintaining the infrastructure;
- iii) arrangements to resolve the competing demands for water and other related environmental challenges; and
- iv) commitment from developing country governments to give water and sanitation appropriate priority and allocate appropriate long-term funding such that the relevant authorities – often local authorities – have the incentives and the money to invest in and sustain better water and sanitation for ordinary people.

Making progress also requires donor support to be effective and well co-ordinated.

4.5 Most traditional donor projects have been successful in achieving the first objective and have sometimes achieved the second. The third and fourth objectives have proved much more challenging (see Box 2). Isolated projects have failed to achieve them, and the lesson has been learned that a better approach is required to have a sustainable impact on poor people's lives.

The solutions

4.6 The clear lesson from these examples – and many others – is that we need to help countries tackle objectives three and four. A number of other donors are active on objective three.

There are good models of water resource management in developing countries. Donors have an important role in helping disseminate the lessons from them, and in helping additional countries to implement them.

4.7 Achieving objective four is the real prize. Developing countries that make water and sanitation a priority can devote substantial energy and money to improving it. Donor funds – in the form of direct budget support – can be a major part of this and can benefit the whole country, not just a small project area. However, it is not for us, as donors, to tell developing countries what their priorities should be. But we can help and encourage our partner governments to understand the demands of the poorest people in their societies, and ensure that these are reflected in government policies and funding allocations. As noted earlier, poor people consistently rate better water and sanitation as one of their highest priorities.

4.8 Donors are in regular discussions with governments as they consider what their priorities for poverty reduction should be. The substance of these discussions is reflected in countries' Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. To date, DFID has tended to focus more on public financial management and social sectors – such as health and education – than on water and sanitation in these discussions. In future, where our main partner governments do not make water and sanitation a high priority in their PRSPs, despite high priority being attached to it by poor people, we will explore why this is the case and what plans the government has to redress it.

4.9 The result of a successful dialogue of this nature should be that governments allocate more of their own resources (including donor budget support) to water and sanitation; that local authorities are willing and able to invest more in local water and sanitation improvements; that these improvements deliver better water and sanitation on the ground for poor people; and that these benefits are sustained from generation to generation, and reach poor people across entire countries. Delivering this outcome will take time – but it is the only effective way to bring long-term solutions to the poor and to achieve the MDGs in water and sanitation. There is evidence that increased government commitment does deliver for the poor. In South Africa, for example, since 1994, 8.4 million people have gained access to water, because of the priority the South African Government has given to this issue. The challenge is to spread such successes – which are currently limited – much more widely.

5. What this means for DFID: Our programme for action

Action in country

5.1 In our Public Service Agreement (PSA) countries,⁴ we will encourage Governments to place appropriate emphasis on all poverty reducing sectors. With regard to water we will help strengthen the countries' Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) formulation processes ensuring that water is given appropriate emphasis in our discussions (see 4.8 above).

Regional action

5.2 We will step up our support to learning lessons across regions. For example, we will support the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW). We will also support regional discussions in Asia and Africa on water and sanitation. For example, we will support the Nile Basin Initiative which aims to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable use of the common Nile Basin water resources.

5.3 We will support the EU Water Initiative and its objectives to improve the effectiveness of EU development assistance on the ground. The UK plays an important part in the EU Water Initiative. One of the first achievements has been the preparation of the Finance Strategy. This provides guidance on water financing. We will continue to lead on finance and contribute to research. We will participate in African and other regional activities dealing with water resource management and provision of water and sanitation. We will also seek to reinforce the overall management and direction of the Initiative to move from discussion to action on the ground.

International action

5.4 We will continue to support the international system for policy dialogue and advocacy in water supply, sanitation, environmental health and water resources management. There are many initiatives, and these need to be rationalised to focus more on developing country needs and to reduce the competition and demands on everybody's time. We will support The Global Water Partnership (GWP) to improve coordination of all of the international action that concerns water (including the food and power aspects of water demand). Through our continued funding to the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and the Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP), we will help donor coordination and international action on water and sanitation. Work on issues relating to water for food is also supported through continuing contributions to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

5.5 We will continue to participate in and contribute to selected strategic international, regional and national water events including the Commission on Sustainable Development and the World Water Forum.

5.6 We are developing and implementing a range of international multi-donor programmes to encourage private sector investment in basic infrastructure services. We will continue to support innovative financing mechanisms for infrastructure. We will also work with other donors to develop new ways to cover commercial, political and governance risks and ensure that investment is leveraged with maximum benefit to the poor.

⁴ PSA countries are Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Lesotho, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, India, China, Pakistan.

6. Review

6.1 We will review progress with this Action Plan in a year and report back to the WSSD Task Force.

6.2 We will also initiate a regular water forum in the UK for communicating our policies and sharing ideas with development partners.

Annex: DFID spending on water and sanitation

DFID has been a major supporter to the development of water and sanitation services, providing some 5%, globally, of the total sector-allocable aid. DFID's bilateral expenditure on water and sanitation over the five years 1998/99 – 2002/03 is set out in the table below.

These figures include only DFID bilateral projects or programmes whose main aim is improving water and sanitation. In addition, there are water and sanitation projects that non-government organisations have implemented and others implemented by our multilateral partners.

DFID deals with water issues as an integral part of other projects in health or education. As a result, the levels of expenditure above understate DFID's expenditure in the water sector. In fact, DFID's total bilateral expenditure on water and sanitation was £82 million in 1999/00, £91 million in 2000/01 and £87 million in 2001/02. These levels represent around **6% of our total bilateral aid budget respectively in each year.**

DFID channels a significant proportion of its assistance (£1.3 billion in 2001/02) through multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and United Nations organisations. DFID's contribution to multilateral spending on water and sanitation is estimated at around £40 million per annum.

DFID provides significant support to three key international water sector initiatives.

- i) DFID provides some 27% (almost £1m a year) of the core funding for the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC).
- ii) £3.6 million, over three years, has been committed to the Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP)
- iii) DFID has contributed some 18% of the total core funding of the Global Water Partnership (GWP); and is a significant contributor to the regional programmes. DFID is currently contributing some £1.8 m a year to the GWP.

	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/ 02	02/03
Water and sanitation spend (£m)¹	29.8	33.4	34.5	34.0	35.0
DFID total bilateral aid (£m)	1161.8	1327.5	1420.5	1529.6	1813.4
% spent on water	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.2	1.9

¹ These figures have been updated following revisions to DFID's internal coding system.

Department for International Development

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the UK Government department responsible for promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty. The central focus of the Government's policy, based on the 1997 and 2000 White Papers on International Development, is a commitment to the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals, to be achieved by 2015. These seek to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

DFID's assistance is concentrated in the poorest countries of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, but also contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable development in middle-income countries, including those in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

DFID works in partnership with governments committed to the Millennium Development Goals, with civil society, the private sector and the research community. It also works with multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, United Nations agencies, and the European Commission.

DFID has headquarters in London and East Kilbride, offices in many developing countries, and staff based in British embassies and high commissions around the world.

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