Citizens' Action
for water and sanitation

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This briefing is the first publication of the *Citizens' Action* project. The first full report will be launched on World Water Day, 22 March 2006.

1 The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are international targets to halve the proportions of people living in poverty by 2015, agreed upon by all 189 United Nations member states at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. They include targets to halve the proportions of people without access to safe water and sanitation.

WaterAid – water for life
The international NGO dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe domestic water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world's poorest people.

WaterAid/Jon Spaull

"I think water is the most fundamental issue and the very first thing that we need as people. Water is life. My people need so many things, I could give you a huge list, but at the top of that list would be clean water."
TA Kuluunda, Traditional Chief for the Kuluunda area, Salima District, Malawi

Introduction

For all the good intentions of governments and service providers too many poor people are seeing their entitlements to water and sanitation unmet. There is international understanding that access to safe, affordable water and sanitation are human rights, and yet poor people see few agencies acting with any urgency. There are the much-trumpeted poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) but poor people rarely see water and sanitation anywhere among the priorities. At the current rate of progress the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[1] of halving the proportions of people without access to water and sanitation will be missed by some distance. In these dire circumstances poor people are asking not only where is the water and where are the toilets, but also, who can be held accountable?

A new source of momentum is needed to ensure that agencies stick by their commitments, that governments put into place the legislation or policies necessary to support service provision and that service providers meet demand. There is an urgent need for action to ensure improved accountability. WaterAid is convinced that poor people themselves should be able to hold service providers and governments to account.

This is the essence of the *Citizens' Action* project: citizens supported to engage in ongoing dialogue and negotiation with service providers and government.

The *Citizens' Action* project

Citizens' Action is a major, inter-agency project which WaterAid believes represents a new way of conducting work with communities who lack adequate access to water and sanitation. It started in 2005 and is set to run throughout the *Water for Life* decade (2005-15).

The basis of the *Citizens' Action* project is the universal right to water, while its method will be to foster a dialogue between citizens and their governments and service providers. *Citizens' Action* complements other WaterAid supported activities which aim to strengthen the ability of local government, not-for-profit and private small scale providers, and communities to deliver water and sanitation services themselves.

There will be projects in many locations and each will be implemented by citizens and facilitated by project partners alongside WaterAid country programme staff. Each project's first stage will ensure that local people develop a fuller understanding of:
• Their entitlements to water and sanitation
• Their current water and sanitation service situation
• The range of responsibilities for policy and service delivery

Citizens will then be supported in their dialogues with government or service providers on these issues. Empowerment is a key feature of the process, and ultimately will lead to citizens gaining access to sustainable and affordable water and sanitation services.

Overall, the project process is innovative and challenging: citizens will take action themselves through direct engagement with governments and service providers. Non governmental organisations (NGOs) will *facilitate* the work, rather than *mediate on behalf of* citizens as is often the case.

Citizens' Action will create widespread opportunities to advocate the principles behind the project, what has been carried out, what has been achieved, the obstacles and the hurdles. The first of the annual, detailed *Citizens' Reports* will be launched on World Water Day, 22 March 2006.

Project locations and methods

The first *Citizens' Action* projects are already underway in Ghana, India, Nepal, Uganda, Bangladesh and Ethiopia. More countries will participate during the *Water for Life* decade. Projects are soon to start in Mozambique, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali and others will follow. Millions of people will be reached.

In all locations WaterAid and other international agencies will work with local partners to assist citizens to conduct the projects. Citizens will decide upon suitable data collection methods from a choice of community scorecards, slum enumeration and censuses, mapping access to water and sanitation, and report cards. These are explained below:

• **Community scorecard:** local people rank or score the range of their services and are assisted to engage with service providers and government agencies to discuss the findings. The exercise is done at a communal level.

• **Slum enumeration and censuses:** slum dwellers and street sleepers join together to map accommodation and amenities in their area and use this as an inclusive basis for planning with responsible authorities. These can be huge in scale, spreading across vast tracts of land where tens of thousands of people live and work.

• **Mapping access to water and sanitation:** this maps amenities and then analyses their distribution. Clear facts about equity (or otherwise) of resource distribution are established and shared between communities and providers or government. Often the mapping process is carried out by professionals; the idea is to embed this process in the community and to ensure that they have ownership of the outcomes and the follow-up processes.

• **Report cards:** this is essentially a professionally conducted market research exercise, much like an opinion poll. The report card name arises from using the research findings as a barometer of public satisfaction with services.

WaterAid and its partners are engaged in some 20 projects in six countries:

Country	Location	Partner	Key features
Ghana	Afram Plains, Eastern Region	Afram Plains Development Organisation (APDO)	Combination of equity of distribution mapping and community scorecards to use as negotiation and planning tools and as the basis for advocacy and scaling up.
	Wa, Upper West Region	Pronet Wa	
India	Bangalore, Karnataka State	APSA	Research with and by local people on adequacy, effectiveness and affordability of water and sanitation services leading to the production of report cards.
	Dumka and Godda districts, Jharkhand State	Sathee	Development of a network of NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) to conduct joint learning and community scrutiny of both policy and budgets.
	Jalon, Orai, Banda and Lalitpur districts, Uttar Pradesh State	Parmath	Assessment of state budget allocation and gaps to create the basis of an action plan on accountability and transparency in future allocations.
Nepal	Thimi and Bharatpur municipalities	Lumanti and NGO Forum for Water and Sanitation	A report card has been created based on community interviews on governance issues in water and sanitation and will be used in negotiation with government for improvements.
	Kathmandu Valley	NGO Forum for Water and Sanitation	A programme of ongoing community consultation in response to government proposals on utility reform and infrastructure development which exclude poor people.
	Various rural districts	Federation of Water User Groups	User groups formed in numerous rural districts across the country to make their voices heard to service providers and government at both the district and national levels.
Uganda	Kawempe Division, Kampala	Local partner: Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI); international partner: Pamoja Trust	The community is undertaking a slum enumeration and census to inform negotiations with the city's water and sanitation service provider. The methods are being adopted through exchange with community members from the neighbouring district of Kisenyi and will form the basis of replication through exchange with other districts in Kampala.
Bangladesh[2]	Kallyanpur Pora Bostee slum, Dhaka City	Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)	Residents map the slum area as the basis for negotiation with providers.
	Jahanabad, Rajshahi, near Chittagong	Village Education Resource Centre (VERC)	Local people conduct community scorecards, rating service provision and discussing improvements with providers.
	Kaptai, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts	Green Hill	Mapping of water points, using geographical positioning imagery, to assess equity of distribution and input into planning with government.
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa	Gashe Abera Molla Association (GAMA)	Three projects started but all except one put on hold due to the political situation. 1. Coalition has been formed to engage with the city authority on the urban renewal project. 2. Community scorecards created with slum and street dwellers to use in negotiation with authorities. 3. Formation of representative user groups to monitor services at public street taps, which are being handed over to local private sector operators.
	Benishangul Gumuz	Local government	Building on mapping work already underway. Local people to use the results to negotiate for full coverage of water and sanitation.
	Oromia: Hitosa/Gonde-Iteya and Ticho	Community boards and local government	Households will monitor service performance and engage with community management boards (of the large scale gravity schemes) to improve citizen-led management.

2   Part of the DfID Bangladesh/WaterAid Advancing Sustainable Environmental Health (ASEH) project.

WaterAid/Abir Abdullah

Photo: Women in the Outfall Slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh, share their knowledge of water, hygiene and sanitation services in their area.

While citizens will define much of the information that will be collected in each location, there will be some common elements to allow comparison across locations and over time. This will enable us to work jointly with citizens to produce the annual *Citizens' Reports* that form an important part of the process.

Critically, we are looking to create a wide alliance at all levels – to give guidance, to manage similar current and future projects, to learn, to share experiences and to spread the word about this exciting approach to gaining access to water and sanitation for more of the world's poorest people.

WaterAid – water for life

WaterAid is an international non governmental organisation dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe domestic water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world's poorest people. These most basic services are essential to life; without them vulnerable communities are trapped in the stranglehold of disease and poverty.

WaterAid works by helping local organisations set up low cost, sustainable projects using appropriate technology that can be managed by the community itself.

WaterAid also seeks to influence the policies of other key organisations, such as governments, to secure and protect the right of poor people to safe, affordable water and sanitation services.

WaterAid is independent and relies heavily on voluntary support.

WaterAid

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