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Conference Issue Paper

East Africa Regional Conference “Accelerating Access to Sanitation”

27-28 November 2007, Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya

The Institutional Challenge Sector Institutions, Private Sector and Civil Society involvement

Latest global monitoring figures show that most developing countries are off track when it comes to sanitation¹ and the situation is worst in Sub-Saharan Africa – despite the fact that it is a fundamental prerequisite to improve living conditions and reach the MDGs.

Apart from the challenge to coordinate different sectors dealing with sanitation and hygiene issues there are several institutional bottlenecks to overcome in the water sector itself:

- A missing regulatory framework (standards and guidelines) in which the different sector players can secure their functions and are obliged to deliver services according to minimum criteria.
- Missing concepts for large-scale implementation for basic sanitation and alignment of stakeholders to such national concepts
- Insufficient usage and coordination of contributions of government institutions, private sector and civil society organisation.

Water sector reforms carried out in many countries in Africa have introduced new legal and institutional frameworks. This has laid the foundation for a reorganisation of the sector and offered incentives for the necessary changes in behavioural patterns. Implementers of reforms still face challenges such as:

- 1) **Regulatory framework for sanitation:** In many countries sanitation infrastructure does not meet the basic standards and demand requirements, it does also not follow comprehensive concepts for public health and environmental protection. The result is that especially in the crowded settlements of the urban poor living conditions become increasingly deplorable and environmental damage is increasing.

As for water, the sanitation sub-sector needs to comply with minimum requirements not only for the design and construction but equally for the management of installations. MDGs declaration, human rights to water, integrated water resource management, etc. all include such minimum requirements which must be embedded into a regulatory framework and enforced / followed by sector institutions. Standards and guidelines in which the sector players can secure their functions and deliver services according to minimum criteria are

¹ Sanitation in the present paper does not include solid waste and drainage of rain water

needed to change the situation on the ground. Such guidelines elaborated in collaboration with other sectors such as health, local government, etc. should also give directions for activities in sensitization, education, effluent quality, users per unit of public and household facilities, data collection, etc.

- 2) **Systemic concepts and alignment for up-scaling:** The sanitation situation in most of the African countries is more than unsatisfactory mainly due to the rapid urbanisation and the fast increase of informal or formalised settlements of the urban poor. Fast growing so called hot spots emerge on an increasing scale. There is the need to move much faster and on a much larger scale than in the past and therefore to give priority in directing investments to areas where the biggest leverage can be achieved

One of the positive results of water sector reforms is generally an increase in the support provided by development partners as confidence in sector institutions is rising. Nevertheless, as sector players increase their funds the challenge of streamlining the stakeholders to a pro-poor and national systemic concept and to an investment program lining out priorities is growing.

Streamlining can only be effective if national concepts are available and are tailor-made to the specific situation. Thereby it is necessary to recognise the different situations and conditions prevailing in rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, a comprehensive concept does not only comprise issues of technology but also financing mechanism (e.g. trust funds), information management, monitoring and evaluation efforts (value for money), etc.

- 3) **Contribution of stakeholders in the water sector:** Reformers have recognised that autonomous government institutions and other players like commercially oriented public providers, the private sector, civil society organizations, etc. have comparative advantages which need to be mobilized in order to improve sanitation coverage significantly. Consequently, ministries have delegated functions to lower levels and structures inside and outside the government setup. Through this, ministries and autonomous government structures in the water sector are increasingly able to concentrate on their core tasks such as the development of policies, coordination, setting of rules and standards, centralizing information for planning and decision making on national level, financial resources mobilization, and provision of incentives to mobilize other players. Other functions such as project implementation, sensitization, education and marketing, or the construction and operation of infrastructure, etc. are left to qualified stakeholders as long as the standards and rules set by the ministries or autonomous regulatory agencies are followed.

Such a reorganization of the water sector is a precondition to overcome constrains in the development effort and facilitates the mobilization of the potentials of different players in the sector. In addition, it helps to enhance performance of sector institutions and organizations such as commercially oriented providers through improving management and attracting better qualified professionals to the sector.

It is now time to start using these potentials created by the water sector reform not only for water but also for sanitation. It is time to look more closely into the comparative advantages each stakeholder can offer in order to improve coverage and not distribute functions and responsibilities according to outdated dogmatic approaches. Functions should no longer be separated according to technology such as sewerage and onsite sanitation. Such a simplification is not helpful because it does not reflect the whole spectrum of technologies in use and often leads to an inappropriate limitation of the contribution of professional water sector institutions to sanitation.

Next to the design, construction and operation of comprehensive sewer and onsite sanitation facilities the water sector needs to have a leading role in the protection of water bodies. This concerns the treatment and reuse of all types of waste water / sludge regardless of their origin which links systems with large networks or complex onsite installations to household sanitation. Standards for protecting water resources are therefore directly linked to the standards for sanitation.

Water service providers are often responsible for the operation of sewerage systems and they need to start paying the same attention to sanitation as is done to water.

Without doubt, the urgently needed large scale improvement of the sanitation situation can only be achieved through a combined effort by several sectors / ministries and by mobilising all forces within the water and sanitation sector according to their specific comparative strengths.