

Conference Background Note

East Africa Regional Conference

**“Accelerating Water Supply and Sanitation for the Urban Poor”:
Pro-poor sector reform, using the domestic private sector,
listening to customers
Nairobi, Kenya 29-30 May 2006**

Background

With the adoption of the MDGs there has been a renewed focus on infrastructure and on Africa. Water supply and sanitation (WSS) have since been particularly high on the development agenda. The challenge to achieve the WSS related MDG targets in Africa is however immense as access remains insufficient in many regions, particularly for the poor. The problem is expected to worsen as the pace of urbanisation in many East African countries continues to outstrip the ability of water utilities to provide services for new customers, or even to maintain service standards for existing customers and there is little prospect for urban water distribution systems to expand quickly enough to keep in pace with population increases.

Although strong emphasis has been devoted to sector reforms and sound governance, the reform process has so far not led to sustainable service provision and improved access on a large scale in the urban and peri-urban low-income regions. Modern infrastructure services largely by-pass the bottom 60% of the income consumers, who suffer the consequences in terms of bad health, higher cost of living, and reduced access to economic opportunities. Due to the unavailability and unreliability of piped supplies, the majority of the urban low-income population relies on small-scale providers (SSP), such as kiosk or standpipe operators, caters or tankers. These SSPs play an important role, serving a significant percentage of urban residents, where a utility is absent or malfunctioning. As SSPs expand more rapidly than the local formal network at the pace of urbanisation, they are likely to remain one of the few realistic options for water delivery in some parts of towns and cities.

The starting position for this conference is that:

- Sector reform strategies and implementation structures need a stronger pro-poor focus
- Pro poor regulation is the key to bring transparency to the sector and make the poor benefit from reforms
- Better use needs to be made of the potential of partnership agreements between the utilities and the local private sector (LPS) including small-scale providers (SSPs)
- Information systems on services and performance benchmarks for the poor need to be adopted
- Service providers need to listen to the voices of poor customers

Organised by

the Kenyan Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)

Main Objective

To set the course for further improvements and initialise action on the ground at this crucial time where less than ten years remain to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

The conference builds on, among others, the results of the WSP's Global Practitioners' Workshop on "Unlocking the Potential of the Domestic Private Sector in the Delivery of Water and Sanitation Services to the Poor" held in Nairobi in June 2005 as well as on the results of the GTZ/BPD "Pro-poor Regulation" Workshop held in Nairobi in October 2005. It also builds on recent work on small-scale providers.

Objectives of the conference - what needs to be done?

The time has come to more prominently tackle the WSS challenges in the urban and peri-urban areas. This conference offers a unique opportunity to **set the course for further improvements and initialise action on the ground at this crucial time where only ten years remain to reach the MDGs**. To improve the lives of poor people sector reforms need to have a stronger pro-poor focus and, in areas, which are not covered by official WSS systems the relationships between the utilities and the SSPs need to be improved to provide an opportunity for realising potential. Better data analysis, dissemination and reporting are crucial factors to accelerate WSS in low-income urban areas. The conference will:

- Provide an overview of the principal issues and challenges in urban and peri-urban areas and present potential solutions;
- Give participants the opportunity to share best practices on viable schemes and models, including alternative models, to meet the WSS needs of the urban poor;
- Engage stakeholders in identifying factors for success and map out specific recommendations and actions that can be taken by stakeholders to improve WSS services to the urban poor.

Main themes

Three key themes will be addressed at the conference:

1. Pro-poor Sector Reform
2. Local Private Sector (LPS) and Small Scale Providers (SSPs)
3. Systematic Data & Information System and Consumer/Community Voice

Four short issue papers have been prepared by the convenors of this conference highlighting the principal challenges and giving the framework for discussion and presentations. Likewise, a number of topics will be discussed in the context of the key themes: sanitation, pro-poor regulation and financing. For each of the main themes output papers will be drafted and later on reviewed to accommodate the conference discussion and results. The output papers will contain recommendations on concrete actions that could be initiated by governments, utilities, regulators, international donors, private sector and civil society to accelerate water supply and sanitation for the urban poor.