

## Poverty Reduction and Water: 'Watsan and PRSPs' in sub-Saharan Africa

### Introduction

Water supply and sanitation (WSS) are critical factors in day-to-day problems faced by the poor in developing countries. The extent and significance of water-related poverty was recognised at the International Freshwater Conference held in Bonn in December 2001, which reiterated the importance of achieving safe, affordable and sustainable water and sanitation access for poor populations, as a central global concern of poverty reduction ('Bonn Declaration', 2001). This challenge will doubtless be highlighted again at the 'World Summit on Sustainable Development' to be held in Johannesburg in Autumn 2002.

National efforts at addressing poverty reduction in low income countries are increasingly focused on the process of developing Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs). Clearly, if water-related poverty is to be effectively reduced, programmes of action designed to address water challenges must find their place within PRSs, and in relation to other key measures for achieving poverty reduction.

Despite the accepted importance of water supply and sanitation concerns, preliminary analysis of emerging Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers (PRSPs) in sub-Saharan Africa (WSP, 2001) indicated that these concerns have not been adequately reflected. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for more than half of the countries which have produced interim or final PRSPs to-date. If water supply and sanitation problems continue to be inadequately articulated in PRS processes across the region, a key opportunity for reducing poverty through addressing water-related poverty will be missed.

Now that the process of producing final PRSPs in sub-Saharan Africa is further advanced, a collaborative project\* is setting out to examine the extent and manner, thus far, of inclusion of water issues in PRSs in five sub-Saharan African case study countries, and, where necessary, to promote better integration in the future.

This policy brief aims to contribute to debate on water and poverty reduction, and to strengthening of the water elements in PRSs. It outlines key issues in relation to water and poverty: first, the intended functions of PRSPs, secondly, the scope of the water "sector" as related to PRSPs, thirdly, the application of sustainable livelihoods principles to national poverty reduction planning and, fourthly, organisational challenges for countries involved in PRS processes. Preliminary research findings to-date are then described in the final section of this brief.

### Poverty Reduction Strategies

PRSs cover a three-year timeframe, with annual review and update. PRS processes, led by national governments, are intended to create a "space" for broad-based dialogue on poverty, leading to better analysis of poverty conditions and ways to combat poverty. Each PRSP is intended to be comprehensive, a statement of the full range of priority

interventions necessary to address poverty.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) originally endorsed the preparation and implementation of PRSPs by borrower countries seeking to benefit from the enhanced HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative.

As the World Bank noted in 1999: "[This] enhanced framework for poverty reduction [...] seeks to ensure a robust link between debt relief and poverty relief by making HIPC debt relief an integral part of broader efforts to implement outcome-oriented poverty reduction strategies using all available resources." (World Bank website, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1999). Since then, the PRSP model has become the centrepiece for policy dialogue in all countries receiving concessional lending flows from the World Bank and IMF.

### PRSPs: Platforms for Financing

An important function of PRSPs is budgetary. A key role, together with another PRS document, the "Medium Term Expenditure Framework" (MTEF), is as a platform for financing. Anti-poverty policies and programmes set out in PRSPs are typically organised by sector or theme, itemised into a list of actions, and then costed for funding. PRSPs are intended to attract funds from national government and external donors. International donors are invited to apply their funds by means of programmatic funding, instead of grants to individual projects, thereby supporting a sector-wide approach. Water-related actions will be more likely to receive funding if water-related needs are clearly articulated and translated into programmes of action in PRSPs; poor integration of water objectives would have lasting negative consequences for mobilising financing within the water sector.

Furthermore, it is intended that agreed national poverty reduction programmes be integrated into national budgeting; PRS allocations are recorded together with funds budgeted for ends other than poverty reduction. This level of integration is justified by the reality that poverty currently affects a substantial proportion of populations in HIPC countries.

### The Water Sector

If water-related interventions for poverty reduction are to be meaningful, water objectives in PRSPs need to take account of water resource management, as well as water supply and sanitation, priorities. Improving access to water supply and sanitation is, of course, not just about taps and latrines: it is about the people and institutions who use and manage them. The impact and value of WSS infrastructure development depends critically on effective integrated management of the broader water resource base – surface water (rivers, lakes, wetlands etc.) and groundwater. Similarly, sanitation practices which remove human waste from the

\*The "Watsan-PRSPs" project is undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute and WaterAid, in collaboration with local partners in the region with support for the initial phase from UK Department for International Development – see website at [www.odi.org.uk/rpeg/wpp](http://www.odi.org.uk/rpeg/wpp).

immediate vicinity of one community are unsustainable if, in doing so, they contaminate the water supply of neighbours. Long experience of the practice of water projects in developing countries has highlighted the importance of balancing 'hardware' and 'software' components of supply provision, i.e. establishing effective institutional management arrangements. The importance of active participation of water users in the design of interventions, to ensure they reflect the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries, is also well documented.

The interconnections between water and poverty of course extend far beyond the need for drinking and washing water. Availability and access to water determines the range of productive water use options available to the poor e.g. agriculture, livestock, fisheries, transport and small industry. Water supply and sanitation issues are intimately linked to matters of water resource management, and *vice versa*. Strategies for water and sanitation need to be linked with strategies for water resource management and in turn priorities for achieving sustainable water resource management should be recorded and reflected in poverty reduction strategies. In short, the water sector needs to be viewed as a broad one.

### Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches

Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) approaches provide a useful, logical way of thinking through the complex and multiple linkages between water, poverty and livelihoods. SL provides a tool for analysing, in a holistic manner, factors affecting availability, access and use of water. A key strength of SL (see Box 1.) is in understanding how existing policy and resulting institutions and structures influence livelihoods outcomes and strategies of the poor and in suggesting multiple entry points for water supply interventions (e.g. access to resources, transfer of technology, institution building, etc).

### Sustainable Livelihoods and National Planning

This project, in its analysis of PRSPs, plans to draw upon insights afforded by SL. Though used most commonly in a local context, SL principles can be usefully applied in analysis of national level PRS planning, taking into account perspectives at different levels (macro and meso, as well as micro). Moreover, just as SL points to the combination of factors which determine the sustainability of local livelihoods, so, at a national level, poverty reduction strategies need to link actions in different sectors. In other words, improving linkages within and between sectors will be necessary if more integrated poverty reduction planning is to be achieved. We return below to what "integration" entails in this PRS context, and the significant organisational challenge it poses.

### Water, Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods

The multi-dimensional aspects of water-poverty-livelihood linkages alluded to above present a challenge for policy and planning. The water sector has been dominated for many years by a perspective emphasising the health impacts of improved water supply and sanitation. SL analysis requires interveners to take a more holistic view of the role of water in support of livelihood activities of the poor. This demands a broader understanding of factors affecting availability, access and use of water as a productive asset and how it is combined with other assets not only to sustain life directly, but also to bring in the income, financial and non-financial, to sustain livelihoods.

There are undoubtedly important health benefits resulting from improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. However, the livelihood impact of water supply

#### Box 1. Sustainable Livelihoods' Principles

- **Assets:** the assets upon which people draw in order to implement a livelihood strategy may be characterised in five types of capital: human, social, natural, physical, and financial;
- **People-centred:** local people are key actors in identifying and planning livelihood strategies; if local initiatives are to be successful, external support needs to focus on what matters to people, to understand the differences between groups of people and work with them in a way congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environment and ability to adapt;
- **Links:** an important aim of the livelihoods approach is to understand links: daily life at the local, "micro" level combines and naturally crosses "sectors"; policies and initiatives at 'meso'/'macro' level need to be sufficiently flexible to encourage inter-sectoral working;
- **Multi-level:** poverty elimination is a major challenge which will only be overcome by working at these multiple levels, ensuring that micro-level activity informs the development of policy and an effective enabling environment, and that macro-level structures and processes support people's strengths;
- **Dynamic:** external support must recognise the dynamic nature of livelihood strategies, respond flexibly to changes in people's situations, and reflect the long-term;
- **Sustainable:** there are four key dimensions to sustainability – economic, institutional, social and environmental; all are important; the challenge is to find a balance between them.

Adapted from Norton, A. and Foster, M (2001)

interventions can extend far beyond consumptive and reproductive uses of water to include opportunities for productive water uses including agriculture, livestock, fishing and numerous other small-scale income-generating activities (e.g. brick-making). Furthermore, there are significant opportunity costs associated with accessing water resources, both in terms of productive time/labour expended on water collection activities and often direct costs in the form of cash expended on water tariffs. Studies have shown that in many parts of rural sub-Saharan Africa women (often supported by girl children) commonly spend several hours each day collecting water, precluding other important productive activities.

Livelihoods approaches are important for identifying multiple entry points and devising an appropriate balance among water interventions designed to address poverty reduction objectives. For example, these might include measures to:

- protect property rights of poor populations (e.g. use and/or ownership of water sources and adjoining land);
- enable their participation or representation on catchment and river management bodies;
- support training for mobilising communities in water projects;
- provide credit for purchase of water and sanitation materials and equipment;
- strengthen structures for decentralised decision-making.

But this raises a question, the subject of lively debate: if access to water for the poor is recognised to be a multi-faceted issue, requiring a range of different types of response, how is this multi-dimensional quality to be reflected in national processes for poverty reduction planning? The relevance of water to many different domains, the responsibility of different ministries and sectorally-defined bodies, means that the handling of water in PRSPs presents an important challenge: for the different dimensions of water poverty to be reflected, should water be designated as: (i) a cross-cutting theme, or (ii) a theme or issue absorbed into several or many sectors or priorities, or (iii) a distinct sector

or priority? The answer depends in great part on how the PRS process is conducted in organisational terms. As will be seen from the following section, if the PRS process in a given country is organised so as to function according to a genuinely inter-sectoral model, water may be identified as a sector in its own right, as per (iii) above, without precluding the kind of integration envisaged in both (i) and (ii).

### Organisational Challenge

Experience with the kind of multi-dimensional planning required in PRS tells us that many organisational problems are likely to arise in practice. If the PRS process is to succeed, the nature of this organisational challenge needs to be acknowledged and decisions made as to how it will be met. The following outline draws upon recent analysis of theory on organisation and management (Maxwell, 2001) showing that planning is not just a technical challenge (setting objectives, choosing targets, devising indicators, drawing up budgets etc.) but also an organisational one.

The PRS process is both multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary. It involves a range of sectors, productive (e.g. agriculture) and also infrastructural and social (roads, health and education). At the same time, the PRSP cannot be written by one discipline alone – inputs from specialists across a number of disciplines are needed. The extent to which the PRSP, and the PRS process more widely, is a whole greater than the sum of its parts depends on the level of integration intended and achieved. Box 2. outlines an ascending scale from minimum to maximum integration.

Option 1 avoids as much as possible systematic integration between disciplines and sectors, with only unplanned, casual interaction for making links. Unless PRSPs are to be a loose collection of separate poverty reduction plans, rather than an expression of one poverty reduction strategy, then this first option is inappropriate for management of PRS processes.

Option 2 would argue for a PRS which is “multi-disciplinary” and “multi-sectoral”, in other words which sets out common goals, but relies on individual planning and action by different disciplines and sectors. A PRSP following this mode would typically record broad national poverty reduction goals in a first chapter, followed by a series of chapters on sectors and priorities with sectoral objectives and actions enumerated separately for implementation by sectoral agencies. As Maxwell observes, this corresponds to a “role” culture common to governments, with ministries resembling the pillars of a building, where most interactions occur up and down the hierarchy of each pillar and few exist across the building, with such cross-linkages as there are tightly defined and controlled by procedures and protocol. Whilst it is easy to see how the habitual structure of government will tend to lend itself to this option, it will be ill-suited to the multi-dimensional aspects of PRS planning and implementation, and indeed to the water sector which, we

have noted above, is itself multi-dimensional.

But although Option 2 provides common goals, it envisages “independent planning”. Option 3 takes integration one step further, with cooperative goal definition, planning and collaborative actions. It is the organisational model which fits the PRS process better of the two. Creation of special posts and departments within government for the purposes of the PRS process is consistent with either options 2 or 3, though the significance of the latter is the change from a role to a “task” culture which entails deeper cooperation between ministerial and sectoral teams and more flexible modes of working. Option 3 is surely what is required in order to bring to bear the combined skills and resources of different parts of government – and civil society – to tackle the major task of poverty reduction and to address the institutional application of SL approaches. Option 4 meanwhile is very ambitious and probably unattainable in practice. The switch from a role to a task culture entailed in Option 3 is likely to present a substantial challenge requiring a cultural evolution within government, supported by civil society and other networks also adopting an inter-sectoral approach.

In answer, therefore, to the question raised above, it is suggested that water should be identified as a sector in its own right within PRSPs and PRS processes, and that water sector actors should work in collaboration with other sectors, pro-actively engaging with them to contribute to and influence their decisions and actions on water-related issues (and accept the converse). As noted above, the aim is to achieve in each case a PRS which is a whole, rather than unintegrated parts.

### Water and Poverty Reduction Strategies: scope of research

The aim of the present project, as noted above, is to assess the level and nature of inclusion of water aspects in poverty reduction strategies in five sub-Saharan countries – namely **Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda and Madagascar** – and, to help, where necessary, strengthen incorporation of water objectives and actions, defined broadly as above.

A set of agreed questions has been drawn up and posed to a research team in each of the five countries to investigate the current status of water management, and water and poverty reduction planning, in each country, grouped around common themes so as to allow for points of comparison. The questions cover the following key issues in relation to the PRSP document and PRS process in each country (see Box 3. below.)

Answers to the research questions will form the core of outline Case Studies for the five countries, providing a survey of the water context, and a first assessment from a pro-poor perspective of the way in which water concerns have been reflected in PRSP content and PRS processes. The aim is to identify and address issues of inclusion by local government, civil society, community and the private sector in the process of PRSP development, implementation and monitoring, and to help ensure that water priorities are reflected in national PRSP plans and resulting expenditure.

### Conclusions: Preliminary findings – further study

The five outline Case Studies will, first, provide some preliminary findings on PRS processes from a water perspective and, secondly, point to key areas for closer study.

From the water perspective, Phase I preliminary insights arising from the PRSP/PRS analysis in the case study countries are:-

1. *Poverty issues:* Each PRSP identifies difficulties of water access as a dimension of poverty, although the level of priority attributed and resources allocated varies. In all

#### Box 2. Types of cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral planning

1. Disciplinary or sectoral	Independent planning and communication leading to influence
2. Multi-disciplinary or multi-sectoral	Common goals, independent planning
3. Inter-disciplinary or inter-sectoral	Systematic integration, leading to co-operative goal definition, planning and action
4. Transdisciplinary or trans-sectoral	Transcend individual skills and disciplines, leading to a new common, cognitive map

Maxwell (2001) adapted from Flynn and Denning 1982

### Box 3. Summary of Questions

- What useful information and analysis on water, and water and poverty, is presented in the PRSP?
- What recognition exists of the central role of women and female children in household water supply?
- Is improvement of water and sanitation access acknowledged as a priority and, if so, how?
- What policies and programmes are proposed to achieve such improved access and how are they expressed in terms of specific objectives and actions?
- How are these objectives/actions placed in the broader context of water availability and water resources management?
- What resources (all types) are allocated to these water objectives, actions and how are they to be applied?
- How is the water and sanitation sector mobilising to participate, with other sectoral interests, in consultation on poverty reduction? How broad and open is that process?
- What evolution in attitudes and approach, on the part of government and other stakeholders, has occurred as a result of the PRS process? are organisational cultures adjusting?
- How may the PRS process be pursued and strengthened in its next stages?

but one country (Uganda), financial and other resources allocated do not match the degree of importance of water issues as perceived by the WSS sector, or are considered to be ill-targeted in terms of types of investment specified (e.g. Malawi). Furthermore, in each country (except Uganda) funds allocated in PRSP action plans (or related PRS documents) do not match the importance of water issues as noted in earlier descriptive parts of those PRSPs.

2. **Sanitation:** In all five PRSPs, sanitation is currently accorded a significantly lesser degree of priority than water supply, despite even lower rates of access and great need for more support to sanitation. Just as for water supply, the manner in which funds are spent on sanitation is as important as the allocation of funds itself. Improvement of targetting of sanitation interventions will be key in each country (this is the stage reached in Uganda).
3. **Discontinuity:** In each country, preparation of the PRSP suffered from discontinuity at key points, resulting in water objectives/reforms articulated by the sector (and in several cases noted by government in draft PRSPs) not finding their way into targets/actions in final PRSPs. For example, in Zambia, urban WSS was initially highlighted as a priority, but then downgraded to a zero funds allocation.
4. **Data:** In four countries, water resources data are scanty or outdated. Participatory assessments have yielded valuable information on water and poverty issues, but this is not reflected throughout PRS texts. Uganda has a longer history of PPA and information yielded has been taken more into account in the PRSP.
5. **Knowledge:** As regards processing of contextual knowledge on poverty into choices of response, in several countries planners find it easier to specify water actions in terms of physical infrastructure alone (e.g. boreholes). Yet PRSP targets need to embrace social, human and natural aspects.
6. **Gender:** Gender is a key element in water and poverty, yet is inconsistently treated in PRSPs.
7. **WSS and WRM:** Coordination between institutions responsible for WSS and water resources management (WRM) is currently weak in four countries. In Uganda, sector review has improved collaboration between these two parts of the water sector (as defined above).
8. **Organisational challenge:** More inter-sectoral working (as described above), by government/civil society, is needed

if PRSPs are to result in coherent PRSPs.

9. **Information and Consultation:** Information on each PRS process should be made more widely available and the level of stakeholder participation increased (especially at district level).
10. **Monitoring:** Better means of monitoring progress against poverty reduction targets are required (e.g. through indicators), as well as for tracking disbursements, actual spending, and assessing success of interventions (the latter is the present concern in Uganda).

Amongst the above issues emerging from the case studies, one area of interest is to be chosen in each of the five countries for closer study during a further stage of this project.

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The authors of this briefing have also had the benefit of first insights provided by outline case studies prepared by research teams in the five project countries:

- Malawi: Maxton Grant Tsoka, Nebert Nyirenda, Linda Milazi, Steve Sugden;
- Madagascar: WaterAid and the Réseau Eau, led by Léa Rakatondraibe and Emma Razafitsheno;
- Zambia: Venkatesh Seshamani of the University of Zambia, John Kelleher of WaterAid;
- Uganda: Esther Kapampara, Daniel Ssekiboobo; Amsalu Negussie of WaterAid;
- Kenya: Prof. Edward Kairu of Maji na Ufanisi and Victor Murage.

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