

2

Serving the Urban Poor: An Overview of Regional Experience

By 2020, it is expected that over 50% of the population in African countries will reside in urban areas.

In order to meet the millennium development goal, urban Africa will require about 6,000 to 8,000 new connections every day.

2.1 A context of rapid urbanization and rising poverty

Africa has the lowest water supply and sanitation coverage of any region in the world. More than 1 in 3 Africans residing in urban areas currently lack access to adequate services and facilities. In the year 2000, coverage levels for water supply and sanitation were 62% and 60% respectively. Africa is also urbanizing faster than any other region. Between 1990 and 2025, the total urban population is expected to grow from 300 to 700 million;¹ and by 2020, it is expected that over 50% of the population in African countries will reside in urban areas.²

For those organizations and individuals charged with service delivery in urban areas, a key challenge will be keeping up with the rapid pace of urban population growth. According to the World Health Organization, in order to meet the recently established millennium development goal of 'halving the unserved population by 2015', urban Africa will require an 80% increase in the numbers of people served.³ This objective would require, on average, about 6,000 to 8,000 new connections every day.⁴ Political commitment to these goals, backed by resources and action, is essential if utilities are to prevent a widening of the gap between 'served' and 'unserved' households.

Given that most of the urban population growth is occurring in communities that are poor and settlements that are informal and unplanned, the task of reaching the unserved will become increasingly difficult. These informal settlements (often known as slums, low-income areas and squatter settlements) now house between 40% and 70% of the urban population and range from high density, squalid inner city tenements to spontaneous, peri-urban settlements lacking legal recognition. Some are more than fifty years old and others are the result of recent urban expansion. Using projections, and bearing in mind that conditions differ between countries and cities, almost half of urban Africans – about 300 million people – will be living in slums by 2020 unless current approaches to urban development change radically.

Regardless of their location and legal status, low-income settlements have several characteristics in common. Their residents often lack access to adequate and affordable basic water supply and sanitation services, lack adequate housing and have limited or no access to other infrastructure and services such as solid waste, storm water drainage, street lighting, roads and footpaths. Improving services in these areas is a practical challenge because of their haphazard layout, high density and/or difficult geographical and environmental conditions. As a result poor households are more vulnerable to natural disasters and are often exposed to multiple disease vectors associated with poor environmental health and sanitation.

¹ Water Utilities Partnership, Project Proposal, 1998; African Water Resources, World Bank Technical Paper no. 331, 1996; J.L. Venard, Urban Planning and Environment in Sub-Saharan Africa, UNCED Paper no. 5 (AFTES, World Bank) 1995.

² IBID.

³ Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment Report, 2000, WHO, Geneva.

⁴ Water Utilities Partnership, Project No. 5, Abidjan Workshop, December 2001; African Water Resources, World Bank Technical Paper no. 331, 1996.

Despite the size and significance of these informal settlements in relation to the total urban population, utilities often play a limited role in serving the households that reside there.⁵ While most utilities have made efforts to provide a basic level of service through public standpipes, these services are often unreliable, inaccessible and/or oversubscribed and as a result many low-income households choose to pay a higher price for water purchased through vendors or private water kiosks.⁶ However, in the studies undertaken, many of these small-scale or independent providers indicated that policy and legislation explicitly prevents them from providing water and sanitation services to low-income customers. This is particularly marked in situations where the poor occupy illegal and hazardous land or reside in unplanned areas.

Given the magnitude and scale of the problem, improving water supply and sanitation service delivery to low-income communities is a priority for most governments and utilities. *Just to maintain current levels of coverage – in the face of natural growth and rural migration – the served urban population must increase by more than 10 million each year for a 10 year period.*⁷ To achieve this increase, the 'business as usual' scenario is not an option. Concerted effort is required by all actors involved in service delivery to identify innovative solutions and appropriate mechanisms for reaching low-income urban communities. However, given their critical role in WSS service delivery, utilities will have to act as institutional anchors, working in partnership with municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and private providers. A reasonably efficient and financially viable utility is therefore a necessary condition for progress at scale, because with the exception of those served by independent providers, there are no examples of sustained progress in serving the poor without this condition being met. This conclusion, borne out by the findings of WUP Project no. 5, is discussed further in the following sections of this document.

Many low-income households choose to pay a higher price for water purchased through vendors or private water kiosks.

2.2 Background to the Water Utilities Partnership Project No. 5

The purpose of the WUP 5 project

The Water Utility Partnership (WUP) for Capacity Building in Africa was established by the Union of African Water Suppliers (UAWS) and its partners TREND and CREPA,⁸ with a view to building the capacity of utilities to improve water supply and sanitation service delivery in Africa. In order to fulfill this mandate, WUP established a series of targeted initiatives including Project no. 5 (better known as WUP 5) entitled 'Strengthening the Capacity of Utilities to Deliver Water and Sanitation Services, Environmental Health and Hygiene Education to Low-income Urban Communities'. The project was funded by the European Commission and managed by the Water and Sanitation Program – Africa.

The objectives of the WUP 5 project

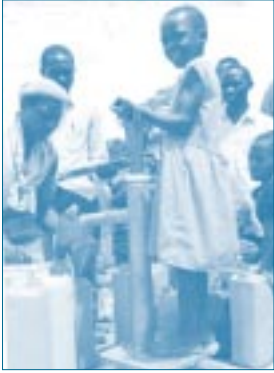
In 1998, the WUP 5 project set out to determine how low-income communities were being served. By drawing on the knowledge and unique experiences of utilities, NGOs, small-scale providers and community organizations, the project aimed to develop a better understanding of the key principles underlying 'good practices' – those policies and practices that have contributed to improvements in the water and sanitation services delivered to low-income communities. The knowledge and experience of a range of actors involved in delivering or supporting these services in

⁵ The term 'utility' is used in this document to refer to the main entity (public or private) charged with providing water supply and/or sanitation services in the urban area.

⁶ Households may choose to purchase water from informal providers for other reasons, such as flexibility.

⁷ As noted by the UN with respect to the millennium development goals.

⁸ Training, Research and Networking for Development (TREND), Ghana; and the Regional Center for Low Cost Water and Sanitation (CREPA), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.



A majority of the good practices identified are spontaneous efforts of small-scale providers and communities.

Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia created the foundation for this document.

The approach to WUP 5 – activities and methodology

Working on the premise that all households have access to some form of water supply and sanitation service - be it different levels of service, delivered by different actors, from different water sources - WUP 5 organized a series of country consultations that brought together a wide range of stakeholders (including utilities, municipalities, line ministries, small-scale providers, NGOs and consumer representatives) to deliberate over critical issues and identify the key challenges of service delivery to the poor. As a part of this consultative process, stakeholders also identified those ongoing initiatives in the region that had improved service delivery to low-income communities. These practices were then documented thoroughly in a set of detailed country case studies (see Annex 1) each of which set out about thirty six practices and addressed different aspects of WSS service delivery ranging from policy development to water reselling.

Information gathered through these case studies was then used to compile this 'good practice' document and to establish a web-based toolkit that provides utilities and other actors with access to information, materials and tools to facilitate their efforts to improve service delivery to low-income communities.⁹

The findings of WUP5

Although utility staff typically represented the majority of participants in all of the consultative meetings, a majority of the good practices identified by the stakeholders in each country were actually initiatives undertaken by small-scale providers and communities, often outside the context of utility or municipal projects. Many are spontaneous and demand-driven efforts promoted by private entrepreneurs and communities.

2.3 Key findings and lessons: How the poor gain access to services

[1] Low-income households access water supply and sanitation services through a broad range of service delivery arrangements (see Figure i). The nature of services available to them varies greatly from city to city and country to country. While in some urban centers utility or municipal services currently reach a majority of households (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire and Addis Ababa), in others, small-scale private providers are the predominant service providers (e.g. Mali and Mauritania).

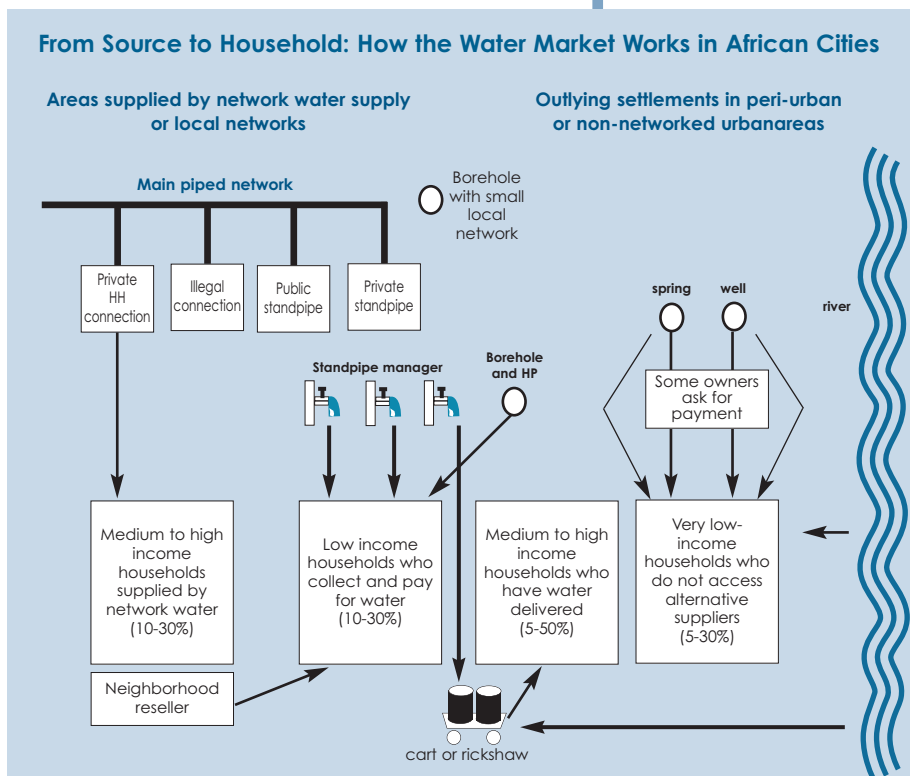
The following **characteristics of low-income service delivery** were identified through the study:

- Most low-income urban households purchase between 5 and 30 liters of water per capita per day.
- Many low-income urban households prefer to pay for water on a daily basis.

⁹ WUP website: www.wupafrika.org

- Many low-income households rely on more than one source to obtain the water they need to survive. This may include point sources (wells and boreholes) and public or private outlets/kiosks connected to the piped network.
- A small and declining number still obtain water 'free of charge' from public standpipes.
- A majority of households purchase water from intermediaries including: landlords (through yard taps), community or private outlets/kiosks or vendors who deliver door to door on a daily basis.
- Due to the prevalence of on-site sanitation systems in sub-Saharan Africa's urban centers, small-scale providers play an important role in the delivery of these services.
- Pit latrines are the predominant form of on-site disposal reaching up to 80% of the population in many large urban centers, however waterborne on-site systems such as septic tanks are also used.

Figure 1



[2] There is a need for review and reform of relevant **policies and strategies** to focus attention on the needs of low-income communities and to create an enabling environment for service delivery. The multi-sectoral nature of the problem requires a collaborative approach that involves key stakeholders in identifying constraints and in developing a framework for action.

[3] Lack of demonstrated **political will** has contributed to the lack of appropriate policies and strategies. While voters in low-income settlements are significant in numbers, their strength as a unified voting block does not translate into a

development agenda that addresses their needs. Although a growing number of countries are developing strategies to address poverty, further advocacy work and technical support will be required to translate growing awareness into action.

[4] Inappropriate **institutional arrangements** and unclear organizational mandates greatly hinder service provision. This applies to utilities, local authorities and other water supply and sanitation agencies. Service delivery institutions require clear strategies and actions for reaching low-income households. Furthermore a lack of inter-agency coordination (particularly between governmental and non-governmental organizations) leads to duplication of effort, contradiction or inconsistency. This is most notable in relation to sanitation.

[5] Inadequate or inappropriate **human resource capacity** in both the utility and local authorities has contributed to low prioritization and limited knowledge of the issues involved in service delivery to low-income households. In addition, weak **management** practices are evident in the lax enforcement of regulations as well as the noticeable lack of attention and support to community-based initiatives.

[6] Given the complexities that often surround the delivery of water supply and sanitation to low-income communities, the **involvement of users or communities** in the planning and management of services is urgently needed. Although poor consumers are often perceived by utilities as being ignorant and apathetic, in many instances they have proven able and willing to help bring about change that responds to the needs they define. The misuse of utility facilities (e.g. vandalism, illegal connections) and non-payment of bills can only be addressed with their participation. Poor organizational capacity and lack of legal status marginalizes many community groups, and may be further undermined by **political interference** in decision-making.

[7] Across the continent, the **informal or unplanned** nature of many low-income settlements is perhaps a bigger constraint to service delivery than land tenure, and remains the key bottleneck to service delivery in all countries. While the actual nature of the service problem differs from country to country, haphazard layout, lack of road access, high densities and overcrowding are also closely associated with the difficulty of service delivery to these areas.

[8] Limited availability of internal and external **financing** for extending services to informal or unplanned areas is a further constraint. Most utilities direct their resources to formal or planned areas as financing agencies are not willing to risk their resources in informal or unplanned settlements. Inappropriate payment arrangements, pricing policies and tariff structures, combined with socio-economic factors such as low and/or irregular incomes, have further compounded the problem. This has led to a general perception that service delivery to low-income settlements is a loss-making activity.

[9] Finally, **communication** between the utility and low-income urban communities on a wide range of issues (e.g. planning and design, operation and maintenance) is not given sufficient attention, and/or inappropriate **information** channels/messages are used to reach low-income communities. The development of effective strategies to sensitize the public on key issues (such as paying for water, raising hygiene awareness, reducing vandalism and misuse of facilities) is uncommon and public or customer relations programs are not tailored to users in low-income areas.



Figure ii

Water and Sanitation Delivery to Low-income Settlements: Key Problems			
	Zambia	Côte d'Ivoire	Nigeria
Legal and Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy for regularizing peri-urban settlements is not comprehensive in terms of scope and content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No common policy or strategies in place for low-income settlements between utility and Govt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of adequate policy to address peri-urban issues and lack of a clear regulatory framework
Institutional arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector agencies do not have clear institutional mandate to provide services resulting in overlapping roles • Local organisations (community) lack legal standing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of dialogue and coordination between main actors further complicated by the use of inappropriate approaches and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of co-ordination between government, NGOs, donors • Low government prioritization of service delivery to low-income areas and reluctance to use alternative approaches to service delivery
Utility Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate capacity for dealing with low-income water and sanitation leads to piecemeal and inconsistent approaches across compounds and no backstopping for community managed water supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders often not competent to deal with community problems • A lack of follow up on action taken by the various parties • Private companies may experience difficulties delivering a public service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of qualified personnel in agencies • Lack of knowledge on socio-economic conditions of communities in peri-urban areas • Lack of enforcement of regulations • Lack of proper supervision of activities
Community Participation/ Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community participation not an accepted approach • High opportunity costs to voluntary work • Inadequate community management structures which are affected by low levels of literacy, low exposure to formal management practices and high levels of illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor community participation in WSS • Lack of organised institutional structures and poor organisational ability/ management skills • Inadequate community management of stand posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate involvement of communities during planning • Lack of co-operation from individuals and from self-help initiatives/across communities • No community efforts to contact concerned agencies
Spatial planning and demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unplanned nature of settlements, inadequate space for latrines, overcrowding, lack of regular lay-out • Incorrect population figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No development allowed in illegal settlements, areas are not accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast growth of the community - demand outstrips supply • Lack of accurate population statistics • Lack of environmental management and town planning • No effort to upgrade settlements by Government

Water and Sanitation Delivery to Low-income Settlements: Key Problems			
	Zambia	Côte d'Ivoire	Nigeria
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor funding position of Councils and donor conditions on funds Insufficient incentive to pay for water Different tariffs applied for the same good, tariff setting not based on full cost recovery Lack of effective collection for payment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problems sourcing financing options particularly to carry out work in marginal areas Heavy taxation on the water sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient funds for water and sanitation in low-income areas Lack of targeted financing from government No framework for including funding assistance from philanthropists
Political Interference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community has no "voice" Community is poorly represented 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politicians influence locations of infrastructure Lack of political will
Socio-economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low and irregular incomes of residents Inability to pay for services at all times Low literacy levels of residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low capacity to pay for the services High rental costs Lack of affordability for household meters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty, low-incomes Illiteracy, ignorance, lack of education Cultural diversity makes self-help activities difficult to organize
Communication, Information and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication breakdown between utility, community and government Poor information Limited consultation of other actors No hygiene awareness programs carried out by utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of water, sanitation and disease links is poor Lack of communication between utility and the community Inappropriate channels used for sensitizing people Inappropriate means for hygiene education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of awareness of how to use services Limited community effort to report problems to utility Low public enlightenment on water usage and bill settlement
Operation and Maintenance/ Service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of sanitation facilities Limited technology choices Contaminated water sources Overcrowding/ overloading services Low service levels/ Insufficient water supply Water from shallow wells contaminated by pit latrines Lack of stormwater drains Leakages Poor quality of water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste water drained into streets and gutters Septic tanks sludge dumped in streets Inadequate water impairs work on hygiene awareness Water rationing - water from barrels is often conserved for days Wells for water supply are close to cesspools No basic infrastructure No spare parts for standposts Unplanned installations in precarious areas Low water pressure in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of planning/ poor maintenance High energy and maintenance costs Contaminated water supply - infiltration from drainage/refuse Inadequate power supply and frequent interruptions Illegal connections Lack of appropriate waste disposal Improper planning of extensions from water distribution systems Lack of planned network to peri-urban areas

**Note:**

* 20-23 April 1998,

** 28-30 July 1998,

*** 3-6 May 1999

Problems identified by stakeholders consulted in each country

Source:

Kariuki, 2000; Iliyas and Sani, 2000; Collignon, et al, 1999; Taylor et al, 1998

In conclusion, delivering an effective service to the urban poor requires efforts to balance technical, institutional, social, financial and economic constraints and requirements. With regard to technical aspects, attention must be paid to the appropriateness of the technology chosen for the consumers in question. Standards may need to be revised and specifications adjusted to deliver an output that responds to local needs (e.g. flow rates, quantities and materials). Institutional issues include: identifying the right actors and delivery arrangements; creating incentives for extending services to poor consumers; and establishing a suitable regulatory framework. Efforts should be made to address social aspects by ensuring that an accurate assessment of consumer demand is available, by consulting with users on the type and level of service desired and improving overall convenience (such as distance/proximity, time, price and volume requirements).

These shifts in approach should be captured in well-considered and resourced policies, strategies and business plans which provide utilities and other service providers with the mandate and incentive to improve service delivery to the urban poor. The challenge is to develop a comprehensive strategy that ensures that solutions are formulated to suit local circumstances and that the approach explicitly directs service to the poor.



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