

# How NGOs strive to serve the poor

IN the last 50 years, the world's urban population has increased fourfold. While urban populations grew rapidly, expansion of water supply and sanitation services has not. A Correspondent with THE GREAT LAKES MEDIA writes what stakeholders in Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda discussed in a recent workshop via the Global Development Learning Centres in attempts to solve the problems.

MANY non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are trying to fill the gap in service delivery in poor urban and peri-urban communities.

In many cases, such initiatives have revolved around the creation of institutions in low-income communities to manage water supply and sanitation.

Building Partnerships for Development (BDP) and other stakeholders have been holding a number of workshops to share experiences on how to build such institutions.

The first tasks of the workshops it had organising were to present the experiences of each NGO. Several main models for service delivery and management in poor urban areas emerged.

BPD is a worldwide network of partners involving government, donors, businesses and civil society.

Despite variations, many of the models with which the participants had experience fell into two or three general categories. Once the main generic models had been established, the participants examined in great detail what the primary challenges (or fatal flaws) were for each.

In the last 50 years, the world's urban population has increased fourfold, and now closes to 50 per cent of the world's population lives in urban centres. But while urban populations grew rapidly, expansion of water supply and

sanitation services did not.

According to Leda Stott of the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) spending on water supply and sanitation has not kept pace with growth, and there are dramatic differences in infrastructure expenditure between cities in low and high income countries. GDLN is an

handpumps; and to be forced to pay high prices for informally-vended water," says Stott.

Local authorities are unlikely or unable to help poor urban dwellers – they may be constrained by lack of resources, technical limitations, or the fact that many urban settlements in which the poor

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institution of World Bank Institute.

As a result, it is estimated that between 30 and 60 per cent of the urban populations in most nations are not being adequately served.

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Paris, the French capital, served as a resource centre for the workshop connected live via videoconferences to the respective areas in Africa.

"The poor are more likely to use inadequate or contaminated sources such as unprotected wells or surface water; to rely on time-consuming methods of water collection, such as standposts or

lessons from work in rural areas (indeed, for many NGOs, working in urban areas was an extension of well-established rural water supply and sanitation programmes).

Experience from the workshops discussion is showing, however, that the urban poor face challenges that are different from, and often more complex than, those of their rural neighbours. Insecure land tenure, relationships with a variety of urban authorities, organised crime, the opportunity cost of people's time in a wage economy, piped-network technology and the realities of a mobile and migrant population all contribute to stress on local management structures in urban areas.

Nevertheless, new and interesting methods and institutional structures have emerged, sometimes leading to unusual partnerships, the establishment of new institutions such as local water boards or community-based organisations with legal standing, and the development of new "paperwork" (including contracts, charters, licenses and regulations) to give the arrangements formal status.

BPD has initiated a practitioner-focused process to examine the issues surrounding local management among the urban poor. The overarching objective of the initiative is, among other things, to foster understanding between governments, utilities (both publicly and privately managed) and NGOs regarding the role and activities of NGOs at community level in urban environments in establishing water supply and sanitation service provision.

reside are informal or even illegal.

The appalling conditions in urban slums has prompted many NGOs, both local and international, to attempt to fill the gap left by conventional water and sanitation service providers. In the last decade, a large number of urban water and sanitation projects have been launched, many of which applied innovative approaches to both the technical and institutional challenges of serving the urban poor.

In most cases, these projects have required the establishment of some sort of specialised, locally-based management arrangement for water supply and sanitation in the low-income communities served.

A consistent problem has been finding management models that work in urban areas. Many NGOs have drawn