



# Water for the Poor: Partnerships for Action

**How to Bring Water to the Rural Poor**

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# Water for the Poor: Partnerships for Action

## A Strategy Paper

*Freshwater is essential for human survival, healthy ecosystems, and sustainable development...our challenge is now to move from commitments to concrete projects...Providing water services to all—especially the poor—is vital in and of itself. It is also crucial for success in our fight against poverty, hunger, and disease.*

Kofi Annan to the Dushanbe International Water Forum, August 2003

Both Kofi Annan's words in Dushanbe and the international debate on water and poverty point to critical areas where action is needed.

- Water resources and water services are key to poverty reduction and sustainable development.
- Water management needs to be viewed as an integral part of the wider efforts to combat poverty.
- Internationally, the context for understanding the role of water in poverty reduction is to recognize how water management can contribute to *all* of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) targets.
- At a national level, the key is to define how water can contribute to reaching national development and poverty reduction goals and strategies.
- All aspects of water management matter: Not just water supply and sanitation service targets, but also water's contribution to reducing hunger, increasing incomes, protecting the environment, improving health and living conditions, and achieving social and gender equity.
- Water is everyone's business. All sectors of society and of the international community must join together to work in partnership to meet these challenges. This reflects the principle of *common but differentiated responsibility* agreed at the WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002.
- Poor people should be in the driving seat. The goal of water management is to provide more choices through which the poor can meet their needs while at the same time build sustainable livelihoods.
- The importance of and main principles for improving water management have been agreed. The focus now is on moving from commitment to action.

This **strategy paper** is intended to help stimulate these actions. It provides a framework for the development of action partnerships to improve the access of

## Box 1. Water and Poverty: The Grim Picture

Globally, 1.1 billion people lack access to improved water supply and 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation. Most (84% for water supply and 83% for sanitation) live in rural areas, but the number of urban residents without adequate services is increasing rapidly. The majority (63% for water supply and 80% for sanitation) of the poor people without adequate services live in Asia.

Health hazards linked to water are endemic in many regions. There are 4 billion cases of diarrhoea each year, causing 2.2 million deaths, mostly of children. Millions more are affected by malaria, dysentery, schistosomiasis, intestinal worms, cholera, typhoid, and other water-related diseases.

Agriculture represents 70% of all water use and per capita food production has risen steadily over the last generation in much of Asia. But many millions are still malnourished. Globally, 800 million people do not have enough food to meet their basic energy needs and 2 billion lack a balanced diet.

Floods, droughts and major storms kill tens of thousands, cost billions of dollars in damages and affect the lives of many millions each year. And things are only getting worse as the effects of climate change accelerate. The most vulnerable are the poorest people in the poorest countries. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states: "Those with the least resources have the least capacity to adapt and are the most vulnerable."

Around 1.7 billion people live in countries that are water-stressed. This number will rise to 5 billion unless major changes are made to global water management. Most are poor countries where scarcity is not evenly distributed. It is often concentrated in more fragile environments where the poor live and try to make a living. Again, it is the poor who are hit first and hardest.

poor people to water within or in connection with the operations of the Asian Development Bank. It builds on the outputs of the Water and Poverty Initiative (WPI), including discussions and documents prepared for the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum in Kyoto in March 2003.

## The Partners: What's In It for Us?

This strategy outlines the role the various partners can play in this and indicates why it is to the advantage of these partners to be involved.

- **National policy makers** will benefit from a clearer link between water management and overall development goals, and from the ability to define how they are meeting the MDGs and other international commitments.
- **Water managers** in government agencies will have a much clearer framework within which they can prioritize their actions and demonstrate their role in meeting national development goals.
- **Nongovernment organizations/civil society** will be able to define more effectively how their actions can contribute to the reduction of poverty and in their advocacy role will have more specific targets to hold the government and the international community to account.
- **International development partners** will be better able to define how their contributions can meet local demands and contribute to the overall process of poverty reduction.
- **Local communities** will have a far greater say over the actions that are taken on their behalf, and above all, will have greater access to water resources as a key to improving their lives and securing their livelihoods.

## What the Strategy Is Trying to Do

The **overall objective** of the strategy is to work in partnerships for action in developing countries that will help increase the amount and improve the effectiveness of pro-poor rural water investments.

The focus is on **poverty reduction** as the primary goal, reflecting the mandate of ADB and the priorities set in the MDGs as well as national development and poverty reduction strategies.

ADB's policy on water, "Water for All," captures this point well: "ADB's water policy... seeks to promote the concept of water as a socially vital economic good that needs increasingly careful management to sustain equitable economic growth and to reduce poverty."

Three aspects of poverty reduction are targeted by the strategy

- Creating **opportunities** for poor people to improve their livelihoods, incomes, and social organization through water management
- Improving **equity** for the poor, with **gender** equity and equity for minority groups especially important
- Reducing **vulnerability** among the poor to the threats of water-related disasters, poor food security, and ill health related to water

Partnerships for action will achieve the overall objective through activities that

- sharpen the **pro-poor focus** of policies and actions to maximize the contribution of water management to poverty reduction;
- increase **local level investments** through increasing flows of external resources and the contributions of local communities to investments in water;
- build **capacity and empower** the poor through social organization around water resources and service provision;
- leverage **funds through partnerships** between governments, local communities, the private sector, and the international community; a particular focus for ADB is to increase cofunding with bilateral development partners; and
- improve **knowledge and advocacy** at all levels in society to build a consensus for actions and investments to improve the access of the poor to water.

## The Approach

The key points of the approach set out in this strategy were agreed by a wide range of people through extensive consultations. They are discussed in greater detail in other papers.<sup>1</sup> Three factors are often lacking in rural areas. They affect the effectiveness of existing projects and limit new investments.

- **The capacity** of community, government, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) at the local level to encourage development and improve governance ensuring that the poor, women, and disadvantaged groups would benefit from water-related actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Soussan, J. 2003. *Water and Poverty: Fighting Poverty through Water Management*. Manila: ADB; Soussan, J. and Lincklaen Arriens, W. 2003. *Poverty and Water Security*. Manila: ADB; and Soussan, J. and D. Frans. 2003. *Water and Poverty Initiative: What We Can Learn and What We Must Do*. Manila: ADB.

- **A streamlined process** of designing and implementing participatory rural investments would lead to more rapid implementation and earlier benefits.
- **Partnerships and cooperation** among organizations to catalyze pro-poor investments and scale-up successful local solutions would ensure wider development impacts across the country.

Rural water and poverty actions need to be integrated into existing policies and programs, to directly target improvements in the water security of the rural poor. The starting point for a strategy will be existing activities, as this will shorten the preparation time and ensure that the strategy is mainstreamed into water management.

Pro-poor rural water and poverty investments need to address three main areas.

- Rural water supply, hygiene promotion, and sanitation
- Water for production and sustainable rural livelihoods, including pro-poor irrigation as well as watershed and ecosystem management
- Prevention and mitigation of water-related disasters in rural areas

The approach is to establish **national-level partnerships** that provide a framework through which local level actions can be generated. Individual local level actions will often be small and fairly straightforward and should not be made overcomplicated.

The partnerships are based on a **demand-led** approach. The idea is to generate practical and achievable investments and actions that can be implemented quickly, with local people having greater control over the process through which they are planned, implemented, and managed. This means that, as far as possible, the types of investments to be made should not be determined before local communities are properly consulted and that there is a need for institutional capacities at the local level through which the views and priorities of local people can be expressed.

This requires a flexible and adaptive framework for allocating funds and decision making within the partnerships. **Empowering local people** means giving them greater choice over allocating and managing resources.

## Building a Strategy: The Process

The development of a partnership for pro-poor water actions will be a process that is linked to other aspects of sustainable development and poverty reduction. All partners will need to understand that this is a process that cannot be set out as a blueprint at the beginning. Flexibility and an ability to adapt to new needs and priorities are essential parts of this process. The following are the main elements of this process.

- **Setting the Goals**  
Agreeing over the goals that the partnership must work to achieve, based on identifying the contribution that water will make to achieving the wider national development goals and the MDGs.
- **Identifying the Partners**  
There are various types of partners, each of which will have an essential and distinctive role to play in the process. The approach is to start with an initial group of key partners that will expand as the need arises.



- **Defining Priorities**

The goals that are set will reflect the country's aspirations over a decade or more (e.g., the MDGs are set for the year 2015). Not everything can be done at once, so that the actions that will be taken to achieve these goals need to be prioritized.

- **Establishing Targets and Indicators**

Transforming priorities into actions will require a set of specific targets to focus action and indicators to measure progress. These targets must be realistic and achievable. They must reflect the resources and capacities available to the partners for implementing actions that achieve the priorities and goals.

- **Making a Program**

This is the detailed planning stage in which the priority actions are designed and linked together into a program that contains a number of actions that different actors will undertake.

- **Advocacy and Capacity Building**

Activities to build political and public support for the partnership, create a better understanding in society as a whole of the potential role of water in poverty reduction, and build institutional capacities to implement the program where these are needed.

## Setting the Goals

The first step in developing a national program is to agree on the **program's goals**. These become the basis for the development of the program and identification of pro-poor actions once the partnership is formed.

These program goals should be based on the country's overall national development goals and international commitments, defining the role that water management can play in reaching these goals.

They should set the framework for different stakeholders to see how the program can help them meet their own specific needs and priorities—a key issue for a successful strategy is gaining “buy-in” from different stakeholders that happens when the stakeholders realize that the strategy has advantages for them.

A framework that brings national stakeholders and the international community together is the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. A key first step in developing a national strategy is to link actions in water management to all of the MDGs and not just those concerned with water supply and sanitation. Goals on health, hunger, income, education, environmental security, and others are all directly and indirectly influenced by water management. Setting the strategy within this framework is a means of bringing together the perspectives of different stakeholders.

The goals should also reflect **national development strategies**, supported by PRSPs and PPAs where they exist. The potential contribution of pro-poor water management to achieving the national development goals in these strategies should be identified.

The strategy must specify the goals in terms that reflect the needs and priorities of different stakeholders:

- For **national development policy makers**, the key is to define how the strategy can assist in attaining national goals such as PRSPs and MDGs.
- **National water sector policy makers** should reformulate policies and goals for the water sector in terms of how water management can contribute to achieving national development and poverty reduction goals.
- **International development partners** should assess how they can contribute to pro-poor water management in ways that meets their own policies and goals as well as contribute to national poverty reduction and development goals.
- **NGOs** and other civil society organizations have a critical role in advocating for goals that reflect the realities of the needs and capabilities of poor communities.

## Identifying the Partners

The activities will bring together development partners from governments, civil society, the private sector, and the international community, who will collaborate, based on the principle of common, but differentiated responsibilities. Four types of partners are recognized

- **Implementers**
  - National or state governments: To create a policy as well as a legal and regulatory environment, institute institutional reforms, and implement major infrastructure investments.
  - Regional and local government: To work with local communities in defining demands and priorities for investments and arrangements for cost recovery, resolving water-related conflicts, and providing services to meet local demands.
  - Local private sector firms and NGOs: To design, implement and operate sustainable demand-led water management and services, including cost recovery, with inputs from local government units and communities.
  - Local communities: To express their demands for water investments and manage water through representative community-based organizations.
- **Facilitators**
  - National and international NGOs, international organizations, and national institutes: To lead the capacity building, process design, and partnership building work. The facilitators will play a critical role in identifying and working with local people to assess and map their demands as well as the system through which they can draw on investment funds.
- **Funders**
  - Bilateral funding agencies: To provide grant financing for both the preparation and implementation of the rural water and poverty actions and capacity building.
  - International financial institutions (including ADB): To provide technical assistance and loan financing in support of project implementation. By coordinating their grant and loan financed activities more closely, the funders will create better synergy among their efforts. For funders, one key step is to make sure that activities for the partnership are included in their country strategies and programs (e.g., the country strategy papers of the ADB or the country assistance plans of DFID).

## Box 2. Potential Water for the Poor Action Areas in Bangladesh and Viet Nam

In Bangladesh, the existing coastal zone development process, which includes a new policy and strategy for the coastal area, is an example of a potential area for strategy development. The coastal zone is defined as districts that border the Bay of Bengal and Meghna Estuary, one of the poorest regions of the country, where people are vulnerable to the threat of natural disasters and many other water problems.

Initial discussions in Viet Nam suggest that the central region of the country would be an appropriate area to the launch of a program of activities. It is a priority area in both water management and poverty reduction and there are a number of existing projects and projects at an advanced stage of preparation that can form the basis for a strategy. The priority issues in this region are a combination of water supply and sanitation, irrigation improvement, and disaster management.

- **Advocacy and Knowledge Partners**

- Those who provide support, sophisticated analytical capabilities and advice to the partners: To be involved particularly in advocacy and preparation activities in each country and allow the other partners to draw on a “knowledge pool” to assist in implementation and capacity building as needed.

## Defining Priorities

The overall strategy goals set the framework but cannot all be met at once. Priorities, both in geographical terms and the types of water actions, need to be agreed among the key stakeholders. This is essential if the good intentions of a partnership and the commitment of stakeholders are to be turned into effective actions on the ground.

The **geographical** priority areas can be based on either administrative or physiographic regions, or a combination of the two. It is recommended that the strategy should not be too ambitious in the first instance, so a contiguous geographical block with a coherent identity should be selected, and shared characteristics in terms of the types of pro-poor water actions needed (see Box 2).

Selection of the priority area should be based on consultation with all key stakeholders at the national level. A background document (a “Water and Poverty Assessment”) summarizing key data on water problems and existing institutions and activities should be prepared to facilitate this consultation. This document should also include the goals and targets discussed below.

A second round of consultations should then take place within the priority area, so that all stakeholders are informed of the strategy and are able to provide inputs into the selection of which problems and opportunities should be prioritized for inclusion in the initial phase of actions undertaken within the strategy.

These consultations form the basis on which the strategy will be made operational and effective partnerships at national and local levels established. Care must be taken to ensure that the specific needs and interests of women, the poor, and minority groups are adequately represented.

The steps outlined above will identify the following

- The overall development goals for the strategy, based on national development targets such as the MDGs and the contribution that water management can make to reaching these goals.
- The area in which it will be implemented as well as the priority problems and opportunities for pro-poor water management in this area.
- The existing institutional capacities and the portfolio of current and pipeline projects that can be included in the initial phase of the strategy.

These different elements of the strategy should then be brought together to define a series of **specific targets and indicators** for the strategy. These targets and indicators must be precise, verifiable, and must be achievable within a realistic time frame and with available resources.

For instance, if the key priorities have been identified as a combination of water supply and sanitation, improved access to water for food production, and protection from disasters, then the strategy should specify **targets** that detail the number of people targeted for improvements to water supplies and access to improved sanitation, the amount of increase in food production and security to be achieved, and the quantities of people and land to be protected from disasters.

These targets must be formulated in a way that specifies their contribution to achieving the MDGs and other development targets within the priority area and at the national level. This should include the contribution to all of the MDGs, including anticipated improvements in terms of health, reduced hunger, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and income for poor people.

Once the targets have been agreed, a set of **indicators** that provide a simple and practical means to measure progress toward the goals and assess the contribution that individual actions make should be defined. These indicators should not be too many or too complex. Where possible, they should be based on data that is already collected, and in all cases, large-scale data collection exercises should be avoided.

These specific targets and indicators should again be based on stakeholder consultations and agreed upon by all parties. All subsequent activities will be justified in terms of their contribution to achieving these targets and a monitoring system should be established to measure progress in achieving them.

## Making a Program

The goals, priorities and targets set the framework that is the basis of the strategy. All partners in the strategy can then identify actions that they will take to contribute to realizing these goals and targets. As stated above, the actions should be **achievable** and should have direct and tangible **benefits** for poor people in terms of improved services, reduced vulnerabilities, and more sustainable resource management.

Each **individual action** should stand alone in terms of its implementation and benefits. The overall program can be thought of as a series of “modules,” that is, a collection of actions that can be planned, implemented, and operated as self-

contained projects, but that also have a synergy strong enough that together, they will achieve the agreed upon targets.

The selection of the types of interventions should as far as is possible not be predetermined. Many options exist, including actions in the following areas

- Water supply
- Sanitation
- Irrigation and drainage
- Rainwater harvesting
- Watershed management
- Soil moisture conservation
- Disaster management and coping/adaptation
- Ecosystems management

Different people and places will need different combinations of these options. And the form that each takes can vary: for instance, what level of service is aimed for in a water supply project (individual or communal connections, quantity of water provided, level of cost recovery, water quality standard, etc.).

The principle of a **demand-led approach** has been identified above. This can be hard to achieve, but is essential. The key objective is to give poor people more choices over the management of water resources and services. The process of demand-led planning will decide what is needed where, and what level of contribution will come from the local community. Of course, this cannot be without limits, given limited resources or institutional capacities. The process will essentially be a “negotiation” between the local community and the external partners in the strategy.

One of the first things that the partners need to discuss and agree upon is the **institutional mechanism** through which the demands of poor people can be identified and integrated into program decision making. Where this is possible, this should be based on existing organizations in local government and the community level, but great care will be needed to ensure that women, the poor, and minority groups, are properly represented as the key stakeholders in these organizations. If such local institutions do not exist or need strengthening, then actions to ensure their development should be a priority. Investments in this capacity development will bring great rewards in terms of effectiveness and sustainability in the long term.

## Advocacy and Capacity Building

A key activity of the partnership is to work together to create a wider social and political platform of support for pro-poor water actions. Linked to this is the need to improve and spread knowledge and understanding of the links between poverty reduction and water. There is also a need to build institutional capacities in addition to those directly part of the planning and implementation of activities discussed above. The strategy should undertake the following activities to meet these goals.

- Develop a **national dialogue on water and poverty**. This will allow the partners and other key actors to discuss and debate water-poverty links and build a consensus on the ways forward. The organization chosen as a facilitator for the partnership should coordinate this dialogue.
- Build the **knowledge base** on key poverty and water issues. This will include consolidating existing information and where essential, new research and data collection. This should be done on a small-scale by local institutions.
- Develop an **advocacy program**, using the knowledge base and the consensus achieved from the dialogue, to prepare materials and hold campaigns that will build political and public support for pro-poor water actions. In some instances, this can include large-scale action programs for advocacy and knowledge dissemination. (e.g., spreading the word on sanitation and hygiene in a manner similar to the WSSCC's WASH campaign).
- Working with key institutions (in and out of government) to **improve institutional capabilities** in understanding and planning for pro-poor water management. This will include focal water institutions as well as agricultural extension, disaster management, and public health organizations that have a key role to play in meeting national goals.

Civil society, NGOs (including policy think tanks), universities, and the mass media, should all play a key role in these knowledge and advocacy activities.

