

# Water policy and policy implementation

by Richard C. Carter and Peter Howsam

**Even the most brilliant piece of policymaking will fail if implemented badly — and vice versa. The water and sanitation sector cannot afford to get it wrong: but is there the will to come up with realistic objectives that translate into sustainable programmes?**

THIS ISSUE OF *Waterlines* has the broad theme of 'Water policy and policy implementation'. The ideals and pronouncements of international organizations, governments, donors, and NGOs do not always translate into reality; why not? The reasons for this gap between policy statements made on paper and change on the ground are various; it may be that policy has been made at a high level, and ineffectively communicated to those working in the field. In any case, policy guidelines alone do not constitute a working strategy for those implementing water and sanitation programmes; far more specific, consumer-centred objectives are needed.

Policy statements themselves can be unrealistic or inadequate, failing to take full account of the situation in poor rural or urban areas. Water and sanitation policy is dynamic, constantly changing, and, one hopes, improving, as better understanding of the sector develops.

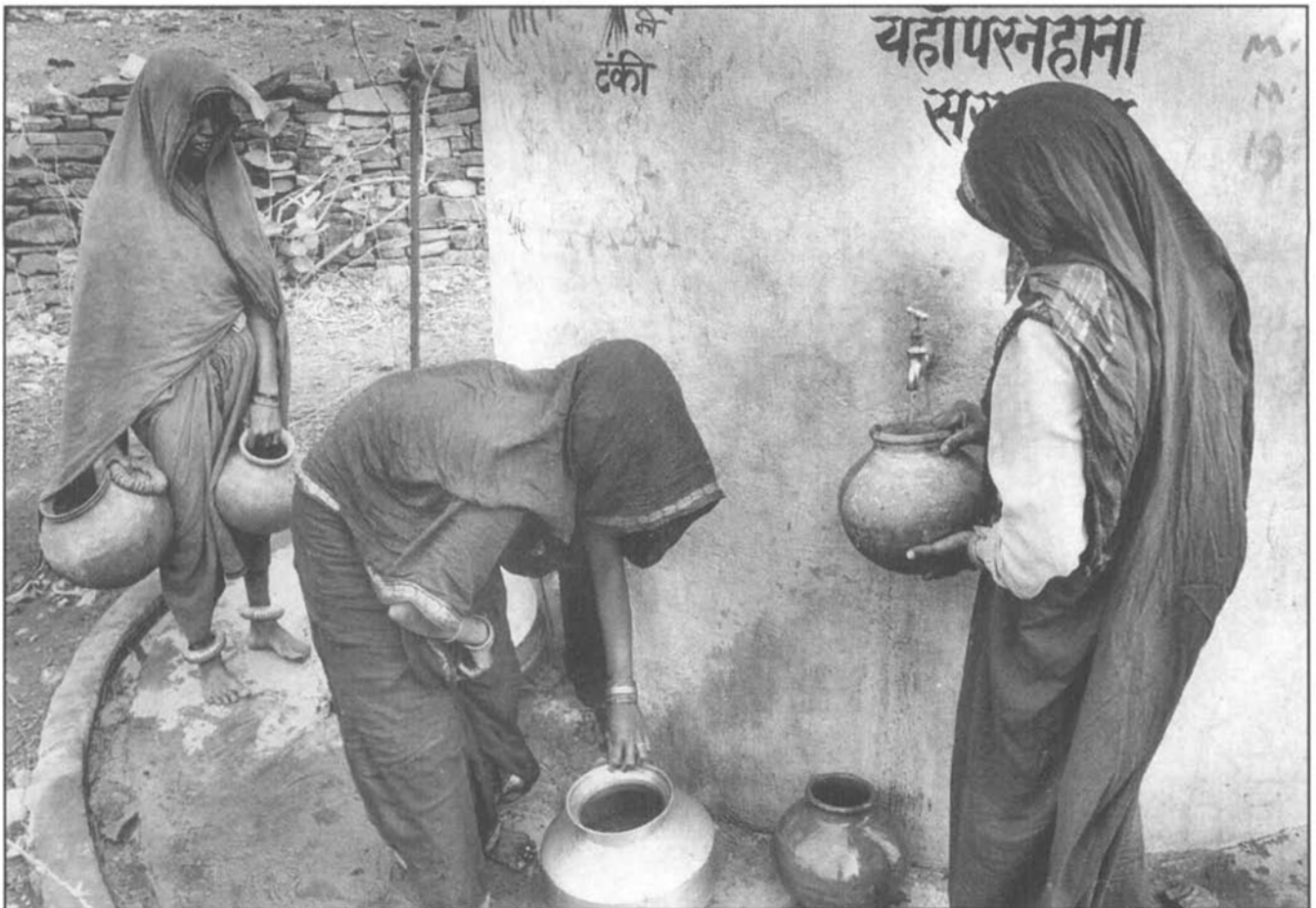
Policy guidelines have implications not only for those implementing water and sanitation programmes, but also for the legal and institutional frameworks which facilitate implementation.

Communication is needed in two directions from the policymakers: 'up' the system to those who change laws and institutions — and 'down' to those who are responsible for implementing policy in practice.

Undoubtedly, there are weaknesses on both sides, both in the process of making policy — which can be distant from the communities which are supposed to benefit — and in programme implementation — where the most recent thinking may be ignored or inadequately taken into account.

The articles in this issue of *Waterlines* reflect the thinking and experience of a wide range of authors and organizations. On page 4, Peter Howsam questions the content of present policy guidelines, pointing out weaknesses or inadequacies while, on page 21, Richard Carter, Desta Demessie and Mogus Mehari call for changes in the processes by which policy is made.

Often there are limited opportunities to get policy right, and to ensure countrywide implementation; co-ordination between all the relevant agencies at such times is of great importance. On page 10, Jon Lane and Julie Jarman examine the means by which general policy guidelines are translated into practical working strategy; while on page 19, George Bagamuhunda and Gilbert Kimanzi, reporting from the grassroots in Uganda, find that consumers often use new water-supply systems very differently to the ways in which designers imagine them to do so. On page 24 Andrew Trevett and Omar



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*Women collect water in Tamil Nadu. Policy statements often fail to take full account of the situation in poor rural areas.*



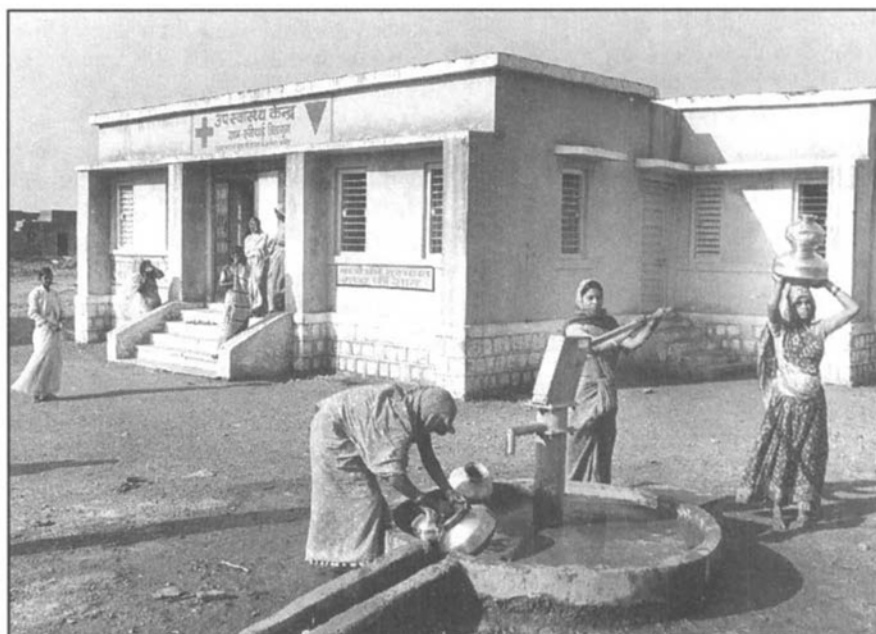
Jørgen Schytte/Sill Pictures

Tanzania. Water and sanitation policies are not set in stone — continual review is integral to reflecting grassroots experiences.

Núñez, in their exploration of support associations, remind us of the practical difficulties of ensuring sustainability, and that continuing support is necessary to achieve this.

The overall lessons which emerge from this issue of *Waterlines* are:

- the water and sanitation policies of the international agencies, governments, donors and NGOs, as stated today, are not 'final';
- we are still learning, and both policy statements and practical strategies for implementation need to continually reflect this learning process; and
- better communication is needed within the water sector, so that policies better reflect reality, and implementation is guided by the best understanding of the wider issues.



Jørgen Schytte/Sill Pictures

### ***In the April issue of Waterlines***

What are the latest trends in the planning and management of water projects? In the April 1998 issue, we bring you articles on approaches to project planning; institutions and the public/private interface; community management in the context of decentralized local government in Ghana; the appropriateness of cost-effectiveness analysis applied to W&S projects in India (see photograph above); working with St. Vincent's socially excluded people; and strategies for transferring ownership in participatory community development. All introduced with a Leader from Frances Cleaver and Tom Franks of the University of Bradford's Development Policy and Planning Unit.

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