

Sustaining Drinking Water Services at Scale: Everyone Forever



IRC ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION NOTE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2013

IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC), The Netherlands, is looking to bring more than four decades of regional and global WASH sector experience to implement an India Programme, in India, closely aligned with the latter's national programmes and policies.

Sustaining Drinking Water Services at Scale: Everyone Forever is a one-day round table consultation convened by IRC in association with the Center of Excellence for Change (CEC), Chennai, and the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), Ahmedabad. The day's consultation aims to identify determinants of sustainable WASH service delivery in India; prioritise its key components; and co-create and shape an action framework that will build on the work of other stakeholders in India, particularly government and donor organisations. The round table consultation is expected to help develop the Action Framework to anchor IRC's India Country Programme for the next three to five years.

CONTEXT

While India's statistical data show improvement in the overall drinking water coverage there are substantial imbalances across the country compounded by low sustainability of infrastructural investments.

Critical water resources scenario

As in the rest of the world, India's water resources are dwindling as a result of overuse, competing user demands and pollution, while low investment in infrastructural maintenance and water security are growing concerns (World Bank, 2005; Mason and Calow, 2012).

Unsustainable ground water use

Irrigation accounts for 80% of the total water usage in rural India. Approximately 60% of irrigation water and 80% of rural drinking water come from ground water, which is increasingly stressed (inter alia, World Bank, 2005).

Competing user demands

Drinking water services have to deal with a critical ground water situation, competing user demands, and increasing pollution from industry.

High investment but low sustainability

In recent years, water supply coverage in rural settlements increased to 91% as a result of the cumulative sector investment of US\$ 35 billion, supplemented by an annual investment of approximately US\$ 4 billion (WHO/ UNICEF, 2010). But this coverage is in terms of 'access to physical infrastructure' and not 'service delivery'. Even using this limited definition, there are problems of 'slippage' due to source unsustainability, especially when the source is ground water. There is also a more widespread, systemic problem of poor maintenance of created assets (World Bank, 2006) with Census 2011 data also showing 30-35% of existing water schemes being dysfunctional while another 30% function sub-optimally.

Problems of 'last mile' coverage

An ongoing concern is the inclusion of the marginalised, the poorest and least accessible populations: Census 2011 data indicate, for example, that 18% of the population still fetch drinking water from sources located more than 500 metres away in rural areas, and 100 metres away in urban areas.



PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Policy, budgets and programmes are not the real causes for poor performance in the water sector in India. There is a large budgetary outlay for WASH initiatives at central government level; over 95% of which is funded through internal budget resources, with a situation where state governments routinely return unspent funds at the end of the financial year. India has innovative and visionary water sector policies, such as the Strategic Plan of 2011-2022 (MDWS, 2011), the draft National Water Policy (2012), the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017), and the 2010 Rajasthan State Water Policy (based on IWRM). India also has technical expertise of high quality with high impact sector programmes in place, such as the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (2010). For water, the vision is one of progressive decentralisation, with regulation by public institutions rather than direct service provision. The Strategic Plan (2011-2022) of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) proposes an ambitious target of covering at least 55% of rural households with piped water supplies by 2017, and 90% by 2022. This Plan anticipates strong support from the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) for improved service delivery of drinking water supplies in rural areas.

Although institutional fragmentation, socio-political issues, technical inflexibility, poor monitoring, unrealistic and archaic legislation, perverse incentives and other factors have been highlighted as other possible causes for poor performance in the water sector, successful WASH initiatives such as the state government-promoted WASMO (Gujarat); the World Bank-supported SWAJAL (Uttar Pradesh), Jalanidhi (Kerala), Jalswarajya (Maharashtra) and Jalnirmal (Karnataka) projects; the DANIDA-supported Tamil Nadu Rural Water Supply Project; and NGO efforts such as those of Gram Vikas (Orissa) and MYRADA (Karnataka) have shown that tremendous grassroots-level change is possible with vision, flexibility and dedication (e.g., James, 2011). While these are initiatives undertaken 'outside' mainstream government structures, the Change Management initiatives in Tamil Nadu (e.g., in the World Bank-supported TN IAM WARM projects and the UNDP-supported Good Governance Initiative) have shown the potential impact of attitudinal change among officials working within the constraints of normal government departments.



The real problems seem to have more to do with a lack of information on water resource availability and use, poor capacities and abilities to undertake the required analysis, incorrect understanding even among 'technical experts' of water issues (e.g., 'water efficiency'; consumptive and non-consumptive uses), resistance to change for various reasons, including vested interests, compounded by a lack of understanding, vision and inflexibility of audit staff in various departments and the debilitating impacts of corruption and political interference on the functioning of government departments, particularly at district and sub-district levels. Without these constraints, government officials have shown themselves capable of path-breaking improvements in service delivery.

- 1 Within this 55%, it seeks to ensure that at least 35% of rural households will have piped water supply with a household connection; less than 20% will use public taps and less than 45% will use hand pumps or other safe and adequate private water sources.
- 2 The Twelfth Five-Year Plan notes that inadequate water resource investigation, improper design, poor construction, substandard materials and workmanship and the lack of preventive maintenance also lead to rapid deterioration of water supply schemes.
- 3 See for instance, FAO (2012).



IRC: WHAT WE DO

IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) envisions a world where every person enjoys their human right to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, now and forever.

Our mission is to work with people in the poorest communities in the world, with local and national governments, and with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to help them develop water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services that last not for years, but forever. We identify the barriers to making this happen and we tackle them. We help people to make the change from short-term interventions to long-term services that will transform their lives and their futures.

We do this by:

- Uncovering the problems people face in maintaining WASH services in the communities that need them most.
- Helping those who plan and provide services to adapt and change the way they think and work, creating learning communities that go on to develop credible, affordable and long-term services.
- Putting ideas and knowledge into practice through innovative action research that helps people make better use of money and time and increases their awareness of what's needed.
- Advocating and sharing expertise, experience and insights with all those who can make change happen.
- Influencing policies and practices that affect those people whose lives and futures are threatened by unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene.

We have:

- A track record of supporting, guiding, and leading successful processes and partnerships that deliver lasting sector change and improvement in people's access to services, with tools and approaches developed and fine-tuned all over the world, including India.
- A proven ability to guide and support broad-based, knowledge-intensive, research-supported change processes that can lead to breakthroughs in service provision to the poor.

We are, thus, well-positioned to support those committed to better WASH governance.

Source: IRC's Vision, Mission, Goals and Values at <http://www.irc.nl/page/73324>

INDIA: POTENTIAL SUPPORT AREAS

The challenge in India is to work with government and other stakeholders to create added value in critical areas. Some potential support areas are in the following:

A service delivery approach

The idea that coverage should mean more than the current MDG definition of 'access to physical infrastructure'—irrespective of the service delivered by the infrastructure—was developed conceptually and practically through IRC's Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale) and WASHCost programmes. Changing the focus from increased coverage to improved service delivery could change the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of governmental WASH provision. IRC has developed tools such as Service Delivery Ladders for water and sanitation that could help understand and measure service delivery, especially in the National Sample Survey studies of coverage.

Local IWRM with community participation

Water 'accounting' and 'auditing' to improve upon water budgeting and create a local information base to support community mapping and site selection and planning of water resource use have consistently been promoted by IRC (for instance, in Ghana and India). In the early 1990s, the coverage of four large rural piped water schemes in Kerala increased from 20% to 60% through community mapping and site selection with PRI support to improve designs of the distribution networks and stand post locations.

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Life-cycle costs approach

Low initial expenditure on drinking water schemes, without taking into account the cost of sustaining services over time, often necessitates costly replacement midway thru the planned life of the scheme. IRC research has shown that estimating the true costs of sustainable supply using a life-cycle costs approach (LCCA) and increasing planned outlays will increase returns on investment over time. Sustainability thus demands that these costs are identified, quantified and budgeted for - and IRC has the experience and the tools to do this.

Effective capacity building

With its vast experience in capacity building, IRC is already running a training programme for senior Indian government officials and is entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie to support capacity building of departmental staff. Other possible support includes putting together learning packages for state and national-level institutions keen on improving their performance in planning and implementing WASH programmes; documenting and analysing promising initiatives drawing on local experiences; collaboration with various Indian organisations (such as the CEC) for inclusion in training curricula, and running a training-of-trainers certification programme for various levels of stakeholders including PRIs, government officials, engineers and NGOs.

Improving intra-sectoral communication

Building on the internationally acclaimed Source Weekly, IRC is an internationally-recognised e-learning centre, providing sector-specific information, which could be adapted to the Indian context. In addition, IRC's conceptual work and practical application of Learning Alliances (in Ghana, Uganda and the Middle East) could be used to set up and facilitate similar multi-stakeholder Learning Alliances at state and national-levels.

Customised action research and analysis

More than four decades of work has given IRC an international reputation for high quality research and analysis, which could help bring global experiences and best practices to the Indian WASH sector, and vice-versa.

IRC plans to set up a dynamic, ambitious, well-located WASH House in Delhi to act as a meeting point – a local, national and regional hub for exchanging ideas and knowledge, backed by the resources that IRC world-wide has to offer. IRC's India strategy will depend on the critical interface between problem analysis and potential areas of support, as perceived by major stakeholders in the sector, particularly government and donors. The round table meeting is expected to arrive at a broad agreement on the outlines of IRC's future engagement in India.

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