BEYOND THE DECADE: A FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD) was launched by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1980 with the goal "to provide all people with water of safe quality and adequate quantity and basic sanitary facilities by 1990". The World Bank estimates that despite the efforts during the Decade less than 50 percent of developing country populations have access to adequate water supplies and only 20 percent to adequate sanitation facilities.

Major factors for the situation are the continuing population explosion and the economic stagnation of developing countries. Qualitative breakthroughs have been made however, through (i) improved coordination for sector inputs at the global and country levels, (ii) systematic formulation of country strategies, (iii) rationalization of the management of the sector, and most significantly through (iv) community involvement and (v) the adoption of low-cost sustainable and replicable technologies. The UNDP/World Bank Programme and the UNDP/WHO Decade Programmes have played a catalytic role in developing activities in these five areas.

To maintain Decade momentum beyond 1990 and to accelerate the provision of water supply and sanitation services to all, with emphasis on the unserved rural and peri-urban poor, by using a coordinated programme "Decade"approach, a Framework for Global Cooperation has been established. A series of meetings of a Collaborative Council of External Support Agencies (ESAs) is involved, leading to a global consultation in India in 1990 for all developing countries to define and achieve consensus on a water and sanitation sector strategy for "Beyond the Decade".

KEY WORDS

Water Decade; potable water supply; urban and rural sanitation; unserved populations; low-cost sustainable and replicable technologies; External Support Agency (ESA); Collaborative Council; Framework for Global Cooperation; sector strategy; Decade Approach.

The world's first "Water Decade", now in its ninth year, is rapidly approaching its 1990 deadline. Conceived at the United Nations Water Conference in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in March 1977, the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD) was formally launched by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1980 with the goal "to provide all people with water of safe quality and adequate quantity and basic sanitary facilities by 1990".

The goal pronounced by the Member States presupposed an increase by four times of investments in water and sanitation projects in developing countries. This goal, although admirable,
was highly optimistic and unrealistic. As a result, coverage levels by 1990 in water and sanitation for urban and rural populations will fall short of the established goal of full coverage at the end of the Decade.

The World Bank estimates that potable water supply coverage in cities will increase from 35 percent in 1985 to some 40 percent in 1990. Rural water supply coverage was 32 percent in 1981 and will probably not exceed 45 percent in 1990. The most alarming statistic refers to rural sanitation where 14 percent of the populations had coverage in 1981 and where the anticipated coverage increase during the Decade will be an insignificant one percent. What is particularly sobering is that the number of unserved populations will increase by 1990 in all domains except rural water supply. Simply put, less than 50 percent of developing country populations have access to adequate water supplies and only 20 percent to adequate sanitation facilities.

A major factor in the present situation relates to the continuing population explosion. Increases in developing country populations are, however, not the whole story. An important influence has been the phenomena of rural exodus and concomitantly the dramatic ongoing increase in urban populations. The World Bank estimates that the developing world’s urban population will increase from 1.2 billion or 31 percent of the total population in 1985 to slightly more than 2 billion or 43 percent of total population by the beginning of the 21st century with more than 50 percent urban by 2125. On the other hand, the rural population during the same period will increase from 2.5 to 2.75 billion. While developing countries rural population represented 69 percent of total population in 1985, it will only represent 57 percent in the year 2000.

Another major contributing factor to the gap between expectations at the beginning of the Decade and the approaching reality has been and continues to be economic stagnation in developing countries in the ‘80s. Declining or static per capita income and a growing debt burden severely affecting domestic investment hit hardest investments in the so called non-productive or social sectors of the national economy. Macro-economic constraints translate themselves down to the communities' or individuals' ability to allocate resources. The World Bank estimates that the total investment required to meet the modest levels of coverage forecast for water and sanitation in developing countries is approximately US$ 9 billion annually. This assumes the utilization exclusively of low-cost technologies.

In judging the Decade, the quantitative yardstick of coverage should be balanced by the major strides, indeed, breakthroughs from a qualitative viewpoint, taken by developing country Governments and donor agencies to improve sector programmes. This involved enhanced coordination at a global and country level, the formulation of country sector strategies and action plans combined with rationalization of the management of the sector and, perhaps, most significantly and certainly most visibly, the increasing adoption of low-cost sustainable and replicable technologies interfaced with a recognition of the pivotal role of software issues.

External donor support of this approach has been spearheaded by the UNDP/World Bank and the UNDP/WHO Decade programmes undertaken in close collaboration and, indeed, in association with major bilateral donors. The UNDP/World Bank Programme has played a catalytic role in developing and demonstrating low-cost and easily maintainable water supply and sanitation technologies. This is, perhaps, most visibly exemplified by the Village Level Operation and Maintenance/Management (VLOM) handpump. The strides made in developing low cost technology can best be underscored by the estimate that across the board adaptation by developing countries of proven and available low cost technologies would result in savings in global investment, to reach full coverage, of US$ 400 billion.

The commitment to a sustained and replicable approach to DWSS was progressively forged during the Decade by six regional consultations of developing countries and by three major consultations of donors. The Consultation at Interlaken, Switzerland, in October 1987, attended by 30 external funding agencies, had as its prime objective the carrying forward of coordinated strategies and resource mobilization activities. This was translated into an Action Agenda to be followed not only during the final years of The Decade but Beyond the Decade as well.

A notable accomplishment of the Interlaken Consultation was the proposed Framework For Global Cooperation Beyond The Decade, which took cognizance of the work that remains to be accomplished, building upon the lessons learned which need much wider application. Specifically, this means a further integration of activities to include such major environmental concerns as wastewater reuse, solid wastes management and surface water drainage. The broadening of the sector into environmental health and protection is a recognition of the
critical importance of checking environmental deterioration in urban and peri-urban slums and squatter communities.

The Interlaken Consultation recognized "that collaboration among ESAs involved in this sector is essential if the remaining unserved populations are to be reached and if the Health for All goals are to be achieved by the end of this century. It was concluded that a collaborative framework should be established to support expanded efforts in accelerating and widening the scope of activities through to the year 2000".

The establishment of a Collaborative Council no later than the end of 1988 was specifically recommended in which, in addition to the concerned U.N. Development System Organizations, multilateral and bilateral agencies would be strongly represented. The Consultation furthermore proposed the inclusion of NGOs* and underlined, as a matter of principle, that developing countries "...must be brought into the consultative process and participate in the Council's activities".

During the consultations and discussions that followed Interlaken, which culminated and was formally endorsed at the Hague Consultation in the Netherlands in November 1988, there was a clear consensus that the primary objective of implementing a "Framework" was to assist developing country governments in achieving the widest possible provision of sustainable water supply and sanitation services in the years ahead. The focus of the proposals was therefore to promote actions to increase both the quality and the quantity of investments in water supply and sanitation programmes at the country level.

To ensure that the donor community is best able to support the framework and the resulting workplans, and to keep the spotlight on sector needs and approaches, the Hague Consultation concurred in the establishing of an ESA Collaborative Council, and agreed that its purpose should be to coordinate ESA support of the overall objective of the Framework for Global Cooperation, namely:

"To maintain Decade Momentum beyond 1990 and accelerate the provision of water supply and sanitation services to all, with emphasis on the unserved rural and peri-urban poor, by using a coordinated programme approach".

As stated, the Council's principal objective, reflected in its work programme in 1989 and 1990, is accelerated sector support to developing countries at the country level. In addition to country focused activities, temporary working groups of developing country and ESA specialists are elaborating strategies in applied research and communication of information. Regional consultations of developing countries to define strategies for the '90s are being organized and will culminate in a global consultation of all developing countries to define and achieve consensus on a sector strategy for the 1990s. This consultation will be held under the leadership of UNDP and is proposed to take place in India in September 1990 shortly before the session of the United Nations' General Assembly on the assessment of the IDWSSD.

While perhaps not unique, the water and sanitation sector since the inception of the Decade in 1981, is an excellent example of partnership between developing countries and the external donor community in the context of a methodology called "The Decade Approach". This led to the definition of cost-effective and culturally sensitive applications providing maximum guarantees for sustainable and replicable systems. The Sector has also been significant for the willingness of the ESAs to collaborate together on an increasingly harmonious basis thereby enhancing the level and quality of support provided to the developing countries.

Accomplishments achieved during the Decade and the principle of partnership which form the basis of the Framework for Global Cooperation during the 1990s give grounds for measured optimism concerning the ability to achieve substantial increases in potable water supply and adequate sanitation service coverage of developing country populations by the year 2000.

*Non-governmental organisations