

SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES AT SCALE – CHANGING THE ‘BUSINESS AS USUAL’ APPROACH

Invitation to a one-day learning and sharing event, Washington D.C.

▪ Re-assessing the “business as usual” approach

During the past twenty years we have been relatively successful in providing new water and sanitation infrastructure - building the physical systems - across many countries in the south. However, despite this trend there has to a large extent been a failure to find durable solutions to meet the needs of the poor for safe, reliable domestic services. Rural and peri-urban populations in particular face continuing and unacceptable problems with systems that fail prematurely, leading to wasted resources and false expectations. Although figures vary, studies from different countries indicate that at any one time somewhere between 30% and 40% of systems either do not function at all, or operate significantly below design expectations.

There are more alarming examples, such as a recent WaterAid study from Tanzania, which found that nearly half (46%) of public improved water points in rural areas are not functioning, and that after only two years following installation 25% of systems are already non-functional. Slippage, where some communities and users fall back to an unserved state (indicating lack of sustainability), is rising up the agenda. This is especially the case in India where slippage has been acknowledged and efforts made to measure it, and also increasingly in other countries such as Ghana. India is experiencing around 30% (annual) slippage in rural water services due to a lack of maintenance of newly constructed infrastructure.

▪ Changing the way we work: a one-day learning and sharing event

Constructing physical systems is an obvious requirement, but it is only one of a set of actions that are needed to provide truly sustainable services. Increased coverage does not directly equate to increased access. We are now moving towards a tipping point with national governments and development partners alike beginning to recognize the scale of the problems associated with poor sustainability and the real threat this in turn presents to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The discourse on sustainability is now shifting to address underlying causes in a more holistic, systemic way; many people in a range of organizations are aware of this challenge and are trying to change the way they do business.

This shift in the way we work - from an infrastructure focus (which counts the numbers of systems built) to a *service delivery approach* (which measures the quality of access to services over time) - will be the subject of a one-day learning and sharing event which is to be held in Washington D.C. on October 12th this year. The objectives of the day are to:

- i. Encourage dialogue and debate on promoting sustainable services and working at scale, including a presentation of innovative approaches to service delivery and better understanding of costs. Concrete examples will be provided on how these approaches are being put to use.
- ii. Brainstorm and identify specific actions that can be taken in the short- and long-term by participating organizations to promote more sustainable services in water and sanitation, within the context of delivering increased coverage.

- **Participants**

This event will bring together some 60 staff and practitioners from a range of US-based organizations including implementing agencies, donors and fund-raisers and advocacy groups. There will be a chance to discuss the way in which organizations work and examples will be shared of practical changes that can help to move us closer to a more sustainable form of water and sanitation service delivery.

- **Conveners**

The event is being organized by the Sustainable Services at Scale initiative of the IRC – International Water and Sanitation Center and Aguaconsult, and the NGO Water For People, with support from USAID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Case Foundation.

- **Logistics**

The event will be held at: The Academy for Educational Development (AED) Conference Center, 1825 Connecticut Ave., NW, 8th Floor Washington, DC 20009

(<http://www.aedconferencecenter.org/main/html/main.html>)

A detailed agenda and further background material on key concepts and issues will be sent nearer to the time, but count on a full day of work, including presentations, plenary debate and group discussions. The organizers will provide refreshments and lunch and will cap off the day with a cocktail hour to continue discussions in a more informal atmosphere.

- **RSVP**

Please send your confirmation of attendance no later than August 31st, 2010 together with any dietary requests to Nancy Taplin at: n.taplin@aguaconsult.co.uk; tel: +44.1206.823329/828010

- **For more information**

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