Sustaining supplies

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Service providers and the challenges they face

In rural areas, non-state providers of rural water services typically consist of civil society organizations, who in turn support community-based management by others. Most are Sert ı p u ! c Î T φ D l T ž D ő m є ẍ l nt in d Ö ò based management is the failure to support communities in dealing with major system repairs, extension and upgrading, or social conflicts.

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In rural Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe, experience has shown that effective support requires joint agency planning and implementation, not only at national level but also at the operational level. This is particularly important in decentralized government structures.

As countries strive towards achieving MDG targets, construction of rural water supply systems is likely to accelerate. Mechanisms and capacities to support provision of these systems are essential, if investments are to be sustainable.

Ongoing support increases the impact of interventions

A WaterAid study of 48 community organizations managing their own water supplies (ranging from handpumps to piped supplies), revealed that continued and on-going external support generally increased the impact of interventions and their sustainability over time. In at least one case, support also helped to sustain hygiene behaviour improvements.

System-level Support to Community-based Service Providers

Community-based providers (committees, operators and managers) need direct support to perform effectively. In many countries this is the responsibility of municipal or district government, often provided by ‘circuit riders’, promoters, extension workers, or technical advisors. A range of typical areas of support and associated roles is given in Table 1.

Conflict resolution often proves to be the main area requiring external support. Addressing challenges to a local committee’s authority, elite capture of system management, or disputes over ownership and pollution of water resources, requires a supporter with strong facilitation skills and the trust of the community, ideally backed-up by regulation and local byelaws.

Whole life cycle support

Rural water service provision is much more than designing and constructing a water system, training a committee and an operator. System operation and maintenance, extension, upgrading and eventual replacement are all key components of ensuring a water supply that is technically and institutionally sustainable. Community-based providers need to be involved in the whole service delivery cycle, enabled by support mechanisms.

Governance in provision

Service provision also includes good financial management; to make budgets, establish a tariff system, collect fees and keep financial records. It requires byelaws that stipulate rights and responsibilities of users and committees. Decisions about extending or upgrading service levels are required, ideally the responsibility of a water committee. Effective and transparent service provision requires a clear separation of function between those who govern (such as a water committee) and those who provide (an operator) the service: both will require external support to ensure that the full service delivery cycle is maintained.

Table 1. Areas and functions of support[1]

Thematic area / **Roles and functions**	**Technical**	**Administrative and financial**	**Legal**	**Organization and management**	**Sanitation and health**	**Environment**
Technical assistance	Assist in design, maintenance, repairs, system expansion, upgrading.	Assist in budgets, accounting, setting water tariffs. Check auditors accounts.	Advise community on legal issues, norms and standards.	Arbitration and conflict resolution ¦	A : e	Ó res ɿ ᵠa ɔ ȳ ᴰ ж
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