

Urban water and sanitation in Somalia

Achieving sustainable development in a challenging environment

Urban water and sanitation in Somalia – towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals

The Urban Water and Sanitation programme in Somalia is the result of several years of joint programme development with key donors to the country. Today, UNICEF has given support to fourteen urban water projects in all parts of Somalia. Urbanization is a clear trend in the country, and for UNICEF, which focuses on the wellbeing of children, support to urban services in Somalia is crucial. Here, families live in closer proximity to each other than in rural areas, and insufficient access to water leads to a multitude of health problems especially in young children. Increased access to safe water in urban areas therefore has a significant impact on livelihoods and contributes substantially to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. UNICEF Somalia has consequently developed a strategic approach that fits into a wider urban development perspective.

A unique environment

Somalia is a country of contrasts. Conflict prevails in many parts of southern and central Somalia, while the north of the country has established government structures that challenge the perception of a failed state. While a large proportion of the population lives in rural areas, urban needs increasingly dominate the development agenda. The continuing instability in parts of the country and environmental emergencies have significantly increased the number of people living in and at the periphery of urban centers. Some of these groups can be seen as temporary Internally Displaced People (IDPs), but a significant share of the movement to cities is part of an inevitable and permanent urbanization that is driven by economic need.

These processes feed into the steadily expanding group of the urban poor and have increased the need for appropriate urban development in the country. Municipalities must more effectively plan expansion and existing space and services must be used to improve the lives of the urban poor and other disadvantaged groups.

Urban water and sanitation in Somalia as part of UNICEF's global strategy

UNICEF, the guardian of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has adopted a distinct 'rights-based' approach to its assistance. The global UNICEF strategy for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) defines a framework for reaching the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, while clearly contributing to Goal 7 - Environmental Sustainability - also is a major determinant for reaching Goal 4, the reduction of child mortality. Children living in poverty are most threatened by poor access to safe water and inadequate hygiene and sanitation facilities. Rights-based programming and pro-poor approaches dictate that the urban poor should not be left out. While in most countries UNICEF is not in a position to expand its support to urban areas in a significant way, in Somalia it must. Here, the situation of the urban population is unique due to the high level of internal displacement, and towns in conflict areas are often the core of any local or regional political stability. Somalia's urban centres therefore are crucial for reliable access to services. UNICEF has consequently taken up the role of supporting sustainable water supplies and good hygiene behaviour in Somali towns.

The crucial role of the private sector

That accountable management is the key to sustainability of urban utilities today is general consensus. That private management is usually better than public management is widely believed to be correct. UNICEF Somalia therefore aims to facilitate sustainable private management structures that are enabled by investment in core water supply and sanitation infrastructure.

In this respect the country has one clear advantage, a vibrant private sector that operates in a comparatively liberal market. Somali municipalities increasingly see the benefits of outsourcing the management of utilities to the private sector to better focus on their core responsibilities. Such public-private partnerships retain ownership of assets in the hands of the public, but allow a management company to operate the system on commercial basis.

Public oversight ensures reasonable and socially acceptable service delivery and cost. The operator can, but does not have to be a private company; a public enterprise that is run under market conditions can be equally successful.

The Somali domestic private sector, however, has limited capacity. Traditional Public-Private Partnership arrangements such as built-operate-transfer are therefore not possible at this time. Rather, the infrastructure is given to an operator to manage under a long-term concession. Jowhar, a town of 40,000 in Southern Somalia, was where the evolution of urban water supplies management from municipal agencies to Public-Private Partnerships started. It began through a management company made up of representatives of key clans in 1997. The management company Farjanno operates under a concession from the regional Middle Shabelle Authority. Similar arrangements were successfully facilitated in 2000 in Bossaso, Northeast Somalia ('Puntland'); in 2003 in Galkayo, Puntland and Borama, Northwest Somalia ('Somaliland') and most recently in Garowe

Puntland in 2005. All companies up to today operate successfully.

A Paradigm for local Governance

'Local knowledge for local problems' essentially summarises the impetus for decentralising government. In Somalia, strong local government, often in the absence of any higher level of governance, has given the country more stability than expected in its situation.

Public utilities, such as water, are a major factor in the quality of local governance. They are often the major source of income in a municipality, and therefore vulnerable to being abused for institutional or personal gains. Transparent management of utilities consequently significantly improves overall governance.

Arguably, private sector participation or public-private partnerships offer the best chance for transparent and accountable management of public utilities. Support to these new management models strengthens local governance in Somalia.

The future

Donors have given strong and dedicated support to the UNICEF urban water and sanitation programme in Somalia. The European Commission, which started with the funding of individual projects years back currently supports UNICEF's countrywide urban water programme. Denmark and the United States are financing projects in the sector. This consolidated funding enables UNICEF to have a broader approach to urban water and sanitation at national level with additional focus on maintaining standards.

There is a need for addressing wider issues. The feasibility of improved tariff structures that discourage excessive water use and support delivery to the poor needs investigation. Concessions for private operators can be further improved to enhance the willingness of businesses to invest. Improved policy can enable investment by increasing trust in the stability of regulatory frameworks. These and other issues will be addressed by the UNICEF programme in the coming years.