

Executive Summary

Setting the water MDG Research Agenda for the urban poor

THE BACKGROUND OF THE MDG AGENDA

Almost one billion people (one in six people) were living in informal settlements in 2005. This is expected to increase to 1.4 billion by 2020, with the biggest growth taking place in Africa and South Asia (UN-Habitat, 2008 in Norström et al., 2010). For water services, the poor often have to pay significantly more per unit of consumption than wealthier inhabitants. It has been recognised that the conventional focus on network utilities is biased towards improvements in access that favour the upper income classes only (EU development report, Bourguignon et al. 2008).

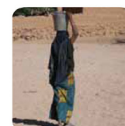
Urbanisation is recognised as a main driver for the future of the global water sector (WssTP SRA, 2010). Urban population growth is driven to a large extent by the growth of the number of poor people living in unplanned areas with inadequate infrastructure and low service levels; the “urban poor”. In this context the urban poor includes the poor living in small and medium towns as well as

cities, since it is recognised that a large proportion of urban growth is in small to medium sized towns (Cohen, B., 2003).

THE PURPOSES AND CHALLENGES OF THE AGENDA

The focus of the WssTP research agenda on the MDGs is therefore aimed at empowering utilities to serve the urban poor. Expertise of the WssTP is biased towards technological RTD for urban water services and can utilise this experience and know-how to improve access to water and sanitation for the urban poor. Water supply and sanitation in the rural context has many overlapping and important challenges but they are not yet to be addressed in the scope of this research agenda.

WssTP understands that one of the most effective ways to improve sanitation and water access for the urban poor is through enhancing the partnership between utilities, social intermediaries, governments and researchers, such that utilities are then empowered to extend their low unit cost services to all urban consumers. This report is seen as an interim deliverable to encourage the ongoing public consultation process and aims at correcting this bias by directly asking the water and sanitation operators and researchers working in the field to comment and correct this agenda.



A Common Vision for Water Research and Innovation

MAIN FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

The aim of research and technology development is not only to produce new technologies and knowledge but also to ensure empowerment and capacity building of local actors in order to develop capabilities at local level. Research is seen as a means to accelerate progress towards meeting the MDG targets but has to be recognised as a necessity functioning within the perspective of the co-evolution of economic institutions, social developments and technological evolution (Kay, 2004).

The main RDI needs identified are:

- To improve the policy framework to overcome existing institutional and financial barriers to serve the poor with water and sanitation services
- To improve the knowledge transfer process from European researchers and industry to low income countries and conversely the innovation needs from low income countries to Europe
- To develop innovative technologies and systems along the entire faecal sludge management value chain in order to ensure affordable sanitation for the urban poor
- To develop innovative technologies and systems to extend the water services coverage with appropriate differentiated levels of services for the urban poor

CONCLUSIONS

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals is not just a question of creativity, knowledge, money or technology but crucially a question of organisation and management. Innovation is recognised as having a fundamental role in achieving MDG 7c which must include socio-economic and political innovations to be effective, equitable and sustainable. WssTP members have welcomed the European Commission's focus on innovation in order to be world leaders in water services.

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