



Professional Associations: The Hidden Resource

New Issues Paper for the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council

Rabat Meeting of the Council

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PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS - AN UNDER USED RESOURCE FOR WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

by

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Preamble

Professional associations (PAs) can make a powerful contribution to the development process in many newly democratised and developing countries. They provide three crucial elements - an effective network for information sharing; a unifying and empowering influence for problem solving and collective action; and a structure for standards setting and licensing.

This paper sets out the potential of PAs and explains how they can greatly facilitate the more efficient use of economic and human resources in the water sector. It describes what well run PAs do and what is needed to improve PA contributions in those countries which lack an effective PA structure.

Professional Associations - the Hidden Resource

Professional associations are one of the most effective and potent forces in advanced countries today. Yet they are also among the least visible. Since they represent a huge collective presence, they impart social and economic benefits that reach almost everyone every day. But the work of associations is often done quietly, behind the scenes. Thus the work they do is frequently not obvious, nor apparent to the wider public.

In tending to their members' collective self interest, professional associations can benefit the public at large. Examples include:- the education of members in technical and scientific matters, business practices and legal issues, thereby improving the quality of publicly delivered goods and services; setting professional, performance and safety standards, plus ethical guidelines, all of which reduce market place risks faced by consumers; collecting and disseminating valuable statistics; through community service, calling forth high levels of volunteer labour, which associations then mobilise and train, to the ultimate good of society generally.

Were it not for professional associations, then other institutions would face added burdens in the area of product performance and safety standards, continuing education, public information, professional standards and ethics, research and statistics, political education and community service.

Lack of Professional Associations is a Handicap

The low level or absence of professional association activity in newly democratised and developing countries handicaps the development of market economies and the private sector.

Outside the official information, dissemination and regulatory framework of the Government, professionals in these countries live in a knowledge vacuum, frequently in conditions of professional isolation.

Governments are still the main employers in the utility part of the water industry in the developing world. The roots of this lie in the 'thirties when the colonial and neo-colonial institutional structures for utilities were modelled on the monopolies in European countries.

A parallel situation exists in post-communist countries, where utility organisations which included the private sector were not possible.

In some developing countries, Governments have provided services typical of PAs. However their efforts are often insufficient, bureaucratic and slow. Standards, once set by Governments, are hard to change. Few governments have standing committees which continuously adapt those standards, to accommodate new developments and technology.

Today the professional side of the water supply, sanitation and water pollution control sector is maturing fast. A whole new world of private (including professional) activities is growing outside the government's sphere of direct involvement and control. The result is a large body of knowledge and power, which currently lacks leadership. This has to be channelled and provided with checks, balances and a structured system, for only thus can efficient use be made of human and economic resources. PAs are ideal for this role.

Governments are realising that national economies have become too large and too complex to keep everything under state control. They need to use all the resources available in their countries. Privatisation and democratically elected governments are the first results, PAs follow closely after.

What are Professional Associations?

Professional associations are member organisations of people in the same business or profession. As the democratic organisation of a profession, they should and can function as open structures that channel the energies of their members. Operating as volunteer, not-for-profit, NGO type bodies, their members give their time and expertise to carry out most of the work, generally supported by a permanent, full time Secretariat. Although based usually on individual membership, it is common to have membership categories for organisations such as service companies, manufacturers, consultants and institutions.

Durability is a keynote of PAs. In advanced countries many associations are well over 100 years old and still thriving. This compares very favourably with the average life of a company, which is about 50 years.

Well Run PAs do the Following

- They have a culture of service to their members, and to their profession, providing value-for-money benefits delivered reliably, and of good quality. They engender an atmosphere in which members are pleased to volunteer:-
 - to organise conferences, seminars, trade exhibitions and other technical meetings

- to write technical papers and make technical presentations and/or serve as paper reviewer, session chairman, rapporteur
- to serve on Committees:- producing standards for materials and processes and unifying good professional practice; writing manuals of practice and reference books; seeking solutions to specific problems; liaising with governments on matters of laws, policy, regulations, standards; setting standards of competence and operating schemes of certification etc.
- to assist in the running of training courses

They draw their members from different parts of the water sector — utilities, consultants, academia, government departments, manufacturers etc — and thus provide a unique meeting place for sector professionals.

- They help to unify a sector, bringing together diverse resources for the solution of common problems, and improving liaison with both government and public.
- They provide vital channels of communication and expertise through their journals, magazines and manuals. These media enable better recognition of problems and widespread dissemination of solutions, plus the means to promote new developments and advances in the sector. Manuals and reference works unify and codify good practice, making this available to all.
- Their training courses and certification programmes provide an environment of continuing education and training, keeping their members up to date. This fosters improvements in work performance, enhancing the effective use of economic and human resources and improving organisational effectiveness, to the ultimate benefit of consumers.
- The research needs which PAs identify and often promote, bring needed improvements, to materials, processes and practices.
- The information and statistics collected by PAs are of value not only to members but governments, consumers and suppliers who want to enter a new market.
- Because of their volunteer nature, PAs help promote a culture of service.
- In countries where a PA culture is well established their work is woven into the fabric of society and the public has come to depend on the social and economic benefits which associations provide.

How Good PAs are Organised

They are organised as not-for-profit associations with a volunteer membership, relying to a large extent on mutual self help and cooperation. At the same time they need to be businesslike in their management and operation, and open and democratic in their affairs.

Most PAs employ a permanent secretariat under the direction of a General Secretary who reports to the association's Governing Body. His responsibility is:-

- to provide day to day management of the association's affairs, including supervising, hiring and firing of the staff (secretaries, editors, accountants etc.)
- to represent the association at all levels including promotion and public relations
- to keep up the membership administration including maximising member enrolment and retention, prompt collection of dues and provision of benefits (journals etc)
- to serve as the steward of the association's assets, collecting recording and keeping safe all monies, protecting investments and other assets and authorising payments
- to provide continuity of leadership during the regular changes of elected leaders
- to organise all meetings — conferences, committees and keep relevant records
- to see to the publishing of journals, manuals, reference books etc.

How PAs are Financed

Membership dues form the basic revenues, from individual members and from associate or corporate members — companies, consultancies, etc. Special dues are offered to retired professionals and students. However PAs generally need more than dues income to provide an efficient and comprehensive service to members. Hence sales of periodicals and books, surpluses from conferences and seminars and training course fees all help to augment the basic revenues. Trade exhibitions provide a good income, from booth rental and admission fees. Generally, PAs need some commercial acumen and business skills to maximise these non-dues revenues and operate the association in a generally businesslike way.

PA Involvement in the Water Sector

Every one of the modern industrialised countries has at least one PA dedicated to the water sector. Many countries have two PAs - one for drinking water supply, the other for sanitation /water pollution control. Nearly all of these PAs are many decades old and still thriving. They are an essential component of their country's water supply/sanitation sector, providing the full range of services described earlier in this paper.

In the developing world, PAs are not quite so numerous but the situation is changing and many new ones have come into being in the past 10 years or so. With the help and encouragement of the International Association on Water Quality (IAWQ) and International Water Supply Association (IWSA) a number of new national and regional PAs were set up in Africa and Asia. Other PAs in developing countries have been set up on their countries' own initiative.

Progress has been varied. The larger ones — the regional PAs or those in the bigger countries — have fared the best. The rest are still at a fledgling stage and many countries have no water association at all. In these cases, often the country is too small to support a PA. In other cases, government monopoly control of utilities, which usually leads to poor professional salaries, means the resources to sustain a PA are lacking. However in many developing countries, the non-utility part of the sector — contractors, suppliers, consultants

— is growing fast. This augurs well for generating the resources needed to support a good PA.

Helping PAs to Reach their Potential

Both IAWQ and IWSA have assisted developing country PAs in a number of ways. Examples include:- bilateral cooperation between an advanced country PA and a developing country PA; a developing country PA hosts an international conference of IWSA or IAWQ which yields valuable experience and revenue; IAWQ and IWSA experts attend the national conferences or training workshops of developing country PAs; magazines and journals are supplied at heavily discounted rates etc. In some cases the bilateral and multi-lateral donor community has provided some initial financial assistance and experts, but the resources available for this have been limited.

However, more needs to be done to help developing country PAs to reach their potential. With the increased decentralisation and democratisation now unfolding in the world, there is a growing need for the services provided by PAs. The current wave of privatisations demands an increase in self regulation by the sector. Otherwise, by default, this function will be taken up by governments with the consequent risk of politicisation and bureaucracy. Standardisation and quality control is highly necessary if the water sector is to grow efficiently.

Professional associations need the following types of assistance to help them reach their potential:

- training for PA staff and volunteer leaders in association management — publications, committee structures, standards, development, certification, information and statistics, conferences and trade exhibitions etc;
- modern equipment for administration, communication and publications;
- some seed money to help develop the benefits structures and association activities etc.

Conclusions

The contribution which PAs make in advanced countries has been demonstrated clearly, including their effectiveness in the water supply and sanitation sector. The potential of PAs in developing countries is great and the challenge is to assist them to realise that potential. Such assistance will continue to be given by the international associations. Their efforts and those of their colleagues in water PAs in developing countries, will be boosted greatly by donor agency and other support. Thus multi-lateral and bilateral agencies, plus large well resourced PAs in advanced countries, are urged to give their maximum support to building developing country PAs in the water sector.