

Policy response to the evaluation of The Netherlands Government's development assistance for water and sanitation

Photo by Stef Smits/ IRC

In 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands (MoFA) published a policy review of the Dutch contribution to drinking water and sanitation between 1990 and 2011. The results of the review are outlined in B1 of this information package. This information sheet presents Dutch policy response to the review's main findings, and highlights lessons for policy formulation.¹

DUTCH POLICY RESPONSE TO IOB REVIEW FINDINGS

Access to (safe) water and sanitation

Dutch aid helped millions of people gain access to improved drinking water supply.

In his letter to the Dutch parliament in June 2012, the then Minister for Development Cooperation Ben Knapen said, the review showed satisfactory results of Dutch programmes, in particular their substantial contribution to achieving MDG 7c (Knapen, 2012). With many countries still far from achieving the target, the Dutch government has renewed its commitment to provide 25 million people with sustainable access in the period 2012-2015.

Increase in improved water sources did not, however, guarantee safe drinking water or access.

The policy review revealed that the quality of drinking water remains a concern. Water quality and monitoring must be improved at local level through training and capacity development. The target of 20 litres of safe water per person per day has not been achieved everywhere. Increasing the number of people with access to quality drinking water, beyond the water

source, is vital. Future policy must pay extra attention to effective measures to improve water safety, and to reduce walking distances to safe water sources.

Sanitation and hygiene

The impact of training and education on hygiene behaviour, toilet construction and use was limited. Knapen (2012) explained that low-cost community-based approaches such as Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) had been relatively successful in preventing open defecation and encouraging the use of a simple, low-cost sanitation facility. Many poor households have given themselves access to sanitation in this way. Safe separation of faeces can be accomplished with low-cost toilets.

Impact on women and the poor

Improved access to water supply significantly reduced women's burden. This increased their participation in programmes and gave girls more time for school. But it had a limited impact on income.

The conclusion that impact on income has been limited was not supported by Knapen. He emphasised that easier access to drinking water frees up time for labour and other income-generating activities, and

¹ Multiple-use water services meet people's domestic and productive needs while making the most efficient use of water resources, taking into account different water sources and their quality, quantity, reliability and distance from point of use. See: www.musgroup.net



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a reduction in school absenteeism among girls is important for their economic independence. In this respect, promotion of multiple-use water services¹ is important to provide water for activities such as small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry, in addition to domestic use.

Water supplies benefitted many poor communities but, to a lesser extent, the poorest segment, while access to sanitation increased mainly in better-off villages and households.

To prevent social exclusion and ensure the poorest also benefit from WASH interventions, other financial measures need to be taken. These could include cross-subsidies, revolving funds, and micro-credit under favourable conditions and tiered rates.

Health impacts

Positive health impacts were modest or non-existent. Increased availability of handwashing facilities and safe drinking water has resulted in the reduction of diarrhoea. Extra attention should be given to sustain efforts that promote hygienic behaviour.

Capacities

The capacity of local communities, governments and non-government organisations for the maintenance of the facilities remained insufficient.

Institutional factors are the most important aspect in ensuring the sustainability of facilities. Capacity development is crucial to embed sustainability into the policies and institutions of recipient countries. Capacity development processes must therefore respond to the local culture.

There was limited involvement of the private sector.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have been intensified to help improve local capacities. Efforts towards strengthening local systems and procedures for monitoring, accountability and quality control are also underway.

Costs and benefits of communal facilities

Costs were low for communal water supplies and the construction of privately owned toilets from local materials.

These costs are often lower than the unit price of € 25 per person used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is proof that the policy to increase the effectiveness of aid has borne fruit, and that more people are being reached with less money.

Partial subsidies remained necessary.

It is unrealistic to assume that without partial subsidies water supplies in rural areas can be maintained in the long term. One strategy is through the establishment of PPPs. This is complemented by intensified efforts to strengthen local systems and procedures for monitoring, accountability and quality control.

Internal policy processes

Internal policy processes have improved but still fall short.

Partially endorsed by Knapen, there is recognition that the large number of decentralised budget holders with context-specific programmes, may be perceived as fragmentation. However, delegating responsibilities for bilateral programmes to the missions provides better alignment with national policies and priorities, as well as context-specific implementation. This is considered to contribute to sustainability.

Fragmentation may be addressed by limiting the number of water partner countries, ushering in strengthened guidance on themes, and seeking external expertise for monitoring and evaluation. In response to the policy review, The Netherlands is committed to invest in more robust internal and external quality control in a range of areas from installations to hygiene promotion activities, training and technical assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONGOING POLICY PROCESSES

Six supplementary measures will be taken by the Dutch government to address limitations to policy implementation.

Knowledge and empirical research

To effectively use Dutch knowledge and expertise, the department has committed to organising sector expert meetings on themes such as sanitation, sustainability and innovative financing. A Kennisplatform Water (water knowledge platform) has been established to tackle context-specific knowledge and support the innovation needed in the government's focus countries.

Stronger focus and consistency in Dutch policy

To bring greater focus and consistency in Dutch policies and programmes, the following had been/are being undertaken:

- The number of water partner countries has been reduced from eleven to seven.²
- Local policy and institutional capacity now determine the design and implementation of country programmes.
- Departmental guidance is now provided to decentralised budget holders.
- A new PPP-fund (Fonds Duurzaam Water, FDW) was opened in 2012.

Sharpen focus on a single dimension of poverty

There now is strong focus on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, which is acknowledged by The Netherlands. Because access to drinking water and sanitation continues to have a great influence on the achievement of other MDGs and is a foundation for socio-economic development, Dutch policy commits to strengthening economic self-reliance, including the local private sectors, in all its water partner countries.

Comprehensive focus on poverty

Dutch water and sanitation policy targets include improved access for all income groups, with a special focus on the poorest. This includes reducing walking distances to safe water sources, and providing the minimum amount for consumption. Cooperation is being sought with community-based organisations to better reach the poorest through initiatives such as Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS). Increased attention will be given to hygiene education, influencing sustainable behaviour change, and shaping policy goals that alleviate poverty.

Sustainable development

Several measures had been/are being taken to improve sustainability in new programmes. These are:

- Inclusion of a sustainability clause in grant agreements to ensure WASH services for a period of ten years after construction.³
- Use of the FIETS strategy (financial, institutional, environmental, technical and social), as a basis for programme design.
- Audits of constructed facilities by external consultants.
- Local government involvement, which is seen as crucial for sustainability.
- Financing mechanisms such as tariffs, taxes and transfers, used together with institutional capacity development.
- Agreements with partners on water safety levels at the pump, and during transport to time of consumption.



Photo by Carmen da Silva Wells/IRC

² During 2013, the number of partner countries with a water focus (including WASH, water management and water for agriculture) increased to eleven. See information sheet C1 for more details.

³ Read more about sustainability and Dutch water policy in C2 of this information package.

Research with international partners

International cooperation and coordination will be strengthened to make better use of empirical research conducted by organisations such as the WHO, UNICEF and IRC. Through the implementation of the biennial Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and

Drinking Water (GLAAS) report by the WHO and UNICEF, The Netherlands continues to support research into the global status of the water and sanitation sector and find ways to improve aid effectiveness.

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Materials for further reading

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This information sheet sets in context the changes adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands in its WASH policy framework. It is a collaborative product of IRC and DGIS and was prepared by Carmen da Silva-Wells, with contributions from Paul van Koppen.

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