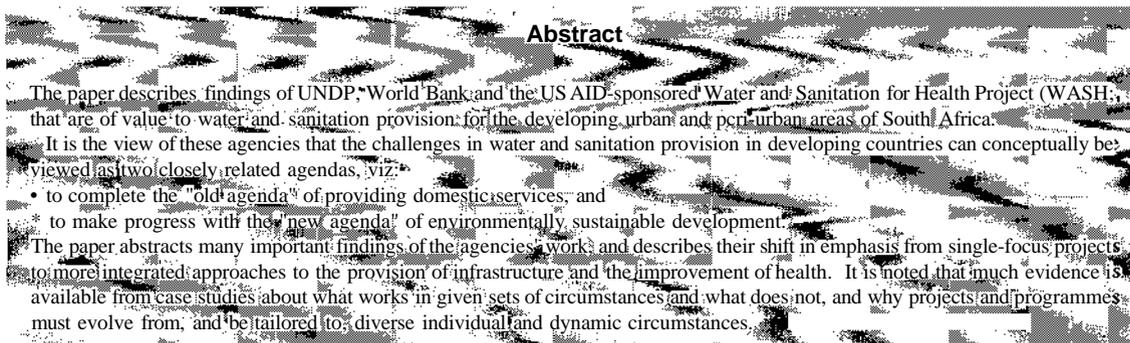


A résumé of WASH, UNDP, and World Bank water and sanitation experience

Kevin Wall

Ninham Shand (Pty) Limited, Civil Engineering, Urbanisation & Environmental Consultants, POBox 1399, Randburg 2125, South Africa



Introduction

The author spent a sabbatical year in the USA, courtesy of the Fulbright Programme. He researched urban growth management and water and sanitation in developing countries.

Findings are presented in this paper that are of value to water and sanitation provision for the developing urban and peri-urban areas of South Africa. The emphasis is on studies documented by and current thinking in the USAID-sponsored Environmental Health Project (until 1994 the Water and Sanitation for Health Project), the UNDP - World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme, and the World Bank.

Two agendas

The infrastructure challenges facing developing countries, particularly in the water and sanitation sector, are formidable. Rapid population growth and urbanisation are stretching the physical capacities of infrastructure and the limits of natural ecosystems. Government budgets cannot accommodate competing demands for investment resources. Many public institutions in the sector suffer from weak management and a lack of an incentive structure to motivate genuine reform. Many initiatives in the sector fall short because they are inflexible, non-participatory and unsustainable for a variety of reasons.

The challenges in water and sanitation provision can conceptually be viewed as two closely related agendas, as follows (Serageldin, 1994; Briscoe, 1995):

The first challenge is to complete the "old agenda" of providing domestic services. Although considerable progress has been made, much remains to be done. A thousand million people still lack access to an adequate supply of water, and 1 700 million do not have adequate sanitation facilities.

Despite the number of urban people with adequate facilities increasing by about 50% between 1980 and 1990, because of

growth in urban population, the number without access to adequate sanitation actually increased by about 70 million!

The quality and reliability of existing services are often unacceptable. Furthermore, the costs of providing services are rising substantially because of rapid urbanisation, mismanagement of water resources, and the low efficiency of many water and sanitation supply institutions.

Developing countries have over the past 30 years allocated an increasing share of their GDP to public spending on local domestic water and sanitation services. It would appear that the proportion of public spending on these services has not been appropriate for three reasons: Firstly, the low contributions of domestic users have meant that supply agencies have not felt obliged to provide an adequate service, and to provide it to all consumers; in a sense, they have felt that they are not accountable to consumers. Secondly, this spending has been used primarily to provide subsidised domestic services to the middle and upper classes. Thirdly, spending on domestic services has left few public resources available for waste-water treatment and management on the wider urban or metropolitan scale.

The second challenge is the "new agenda" of environmentally sustainable development. In some respects, viz. high costs and limited resources, the situation confronting developing countries is similar to that faced by industrialised countries. But in other respects the task for developing countries is considerably more difficult. Water in developing countries is generally much more seriously degraded and is deteriorating rapidly; far fewer financial resources are available for environmental protection; and institutional capacity is weaker.

Changing emphasis

A changing emphasis of the international agencies involved in water and sanitation provision is noticeable as follows:

- from single-focus projects (e.g. focus on technology, or on preventive health, or on hygiene education); to
- more integrated approaches to the provision of infrastructure and the improvement of individual and community health. This is accompanied by other shifts in emphasis, particularly:
- from primary attention on rural areas, to primary attention on

* To whom all correspondence should be addressed.
(011) 787-5906; fax (011) 789-4635; e-mail nsitr@cis.co.za
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