

Knowledge uptake by technical professionals and decision-makers for developmental water services

Part 1: Methodology, knowledge and context

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Abstract

While significant knowledge appears to be available on developmental water services (a term for service provision, to meet developmental objectives, with an emphasis on poor communities, in which a range of factors other than purely technical factors are addressed), there appears to be insufficient uptake of this knowledge (meaning the acquisition, comprehension and application in context) by technical professionals and decision-makers responsible for service provision, as evidenced by persistent service delivery backlogs and poor sustainability. This investigation developed and documented an exploratory methodology based primarily on in-depth interviews and a literature review which enabled the collection of evidence and development of a 'first pass' typology of knowledge, context and individual competencies with respect to developmental water services. This paper addresses the aspects of knowledge and context. Individual competencies are addressed in the companion paper (Part 2).

With respect to knowledge, the investigation found that while there is a lot of information readily available in the sector on the provision of water services to meet developmental objectives, what appears to be weak or missing is information on how to apply this information in context. With respect to context, the investigation established a simple preliminary framework which described the combination of political and technical disciplines in a unified approach, and the translation of this into the bureaucracy. On the evidence of the in-depth interviews, the contextual aspects of developmental water services, described by the above framework – and, in particular, the workings of the bureaucracy – would appear to constitute the major challenge facing high-level technical professionals and decision-makers in the provision and sustainability of water services.

More generally, the investigation established that for effective provision of water services within a developmental context, there is a close relationship between the three components of knowledge, context and individual competencies; and that it is difficult to address any one of the three components without reference to the other two.

Keywords: knowledge, developmental, water services, decision-makers, technical professionals, context, individual competencies, bureaucracy, interviews