

# Water operator partnerships as a model to achieve the Millenium Development Goals for water supply? Lessons from four cities in Mozambique

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## **Abstract**

In the void left by the declining popularity of public-private partnerships, the concept of ‘water operator partnerships’ (WOPs) has increasingly been promoted as an alternative for improving water services provision in developing countries. This paper assesses the potential of such partnerships as a ‘model’ for contributing to the MDGs, by focusing on 4 water utilities in Mozambique. Although, the study found these partnerships to be successful, it is more sceptical about the potential for this type of water operator partnership to significantly contribute towards achieving the MDGs. The main reason for this is that the replicability of the partnership-model studied in Mozambique was found to be quite limited. The case presented in this article highlights 3 main lessons for water operator partnerships in the water services sector. First, the availability of investment funds is a crucial component of a partnership. Without access to such funds the impact of such a partnership is likely to be limited. Secondly, the level of commitment to the partnership needs to be high if it is to be successful. This commitment is likely to take shape in the form of both financial commitment as well as commitment of time and effort of the organisations involved. Thirdly, even if the partnership is a success, the question of how sustainable the achieved performance gains are remains a point of concern. All in all, although we acknowledge the success achieved by the studied partnership, the findings have made us hesitant about the potential for replicating this ‘model’ at a large scale.

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