

**Beyond the Status Quo:  
Bringing Down Barriers to Water and Sanitation Provision in Africa through  
Implementation of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act**

**Testimony before the United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health  
May 16, 2007**

**By Peter Lochery  
Water Team Director  
CARE**

First, I would like to thank Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Smith and the other Members of both the House Foreign Affairs committee and the subcommittee on Africa and Global Health for holding this important hearing. It is an honor to be asked to share CARE's perspective on the African water crisis based on our sixty plus years of working with communities in some of the world's poorest countries.

The Situation on the Ground

Access to safe water and sanitation is as fundamental to life as food or air, yet an alarming number of people in the world's poorest countries remain without it. Worldwide, 1.1 billion people lack access to a sufficient amount of clean water and more than double that amount—2.6 billion people—lack access to adequate sanitation services, forcing them to live in degrading and unhealthy environments. The problem is global in scope, but is particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where the percentage of people without access to an improved water source is over 50 percent and almost 70 percent of the population lacks access to improved sanitation<sup>1</sup>. The absence of these most basic of services has devastating ramifications on all other aspects of life—including basic health, education and livelihoods to name a few—and has undoubtedly proven a barrier to unlocking Africa's developmental potential.

Beyond running through these disturbing statistics, I was asked to present what the situation is on the ground in Africa from the perspective of an operational organization engaged on a daily basis in combating the African water crisis. In their paper, "Getting to boiling point: Turning up the heat on water and sanitation,"<sup>2</sup> one of our widely-respected colleague organizations, WaterAid, surveyed development practitioners in 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia regarding challenges to expanding

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Human Development Report 2006. *Beyond Scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*. p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Redhouse, David. *Getting to boiling point: Turning up the heat on water and sanitation*. WaterAid, London.

access to water and sanitation<sup>3</sup>. The survey asked about the “the day-to-day blockages” actually preventing them from being able to deliver these services and found several common themes arose across the countries in question. I would like to echo and expand upon some of these themes.

*Prioritization—putting water and sanitation at the heart of poverty reduction*

In needs assessments, when poor people are surveyed, they consistently name lack of water among the main causes of their poverty, and give it first priority in their visions of a better future. Where they have a voice, poor people call on their governments to provide water and try to hold them accountable where possible when services are not forthcoming. However, national governments frequently do not reflect this public priority in their policies, nor do they provide adequate resources to make significant change. In countries where water has been given priority on the national stage and adequate resources are provided to back it, greater improvements in the expansion of service delivery have been seen. Political will and getting priorities straight are key ingredients in progress forward.

*Transparency—be open about what’s going on*

It is often difficult to identify the extent to which a government has prioritized water and sanitation funding and service improvement. This lack of transparency makes it hard to determine how efficiently and effectively funds are being used. In some cases, funds may be used to build and improve water supply, however, if and when documents are made public, they sometimes show that water and sanitation improvements were not concentrated among the areas and populations experiencing the greatest need. Frequently, it is difficult to even track with any precision what the government in question has actually done in the sector.

*Equity—some for all, not all for some*

It is necessary to increase the equity of services and target funding and programs where the need is greatest and will have the highest impact. As WaterAid writes, “poor targeting of available resources exacerbates the problem of shortfalls in those resources.”<sup>4</sup> An analysis by NGOs, including CARE, for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in 2004 also found that less than 40% of water resources are directed to the countries where 90% of the people who need them live.<sup>5</sup> While additional and more robust funding is desperately needed, access to water and sanitation could be greatly increased by simply redirecting funds that are already available, to areas where each dollar would go further.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *A scorecard assessment of developing countries and donor progress.* April 2004.

*Coordination—don't duplicate*

Similarly, access to water and sanitation could be improved if funds that are currently available were better coordinated. Lack of coordination often results in a variety of duplicative interventions, sometimes resulting in contradictory approaches and messages. Furthermore, lack of coordination prevents the complementarity and synergy that is so desperately needed to leverage the precious resources directed toward water and sanitation initiatives.

*Capacity—sustainable results depend on it*

Sometimes recipient governments have difficulty utilizing aid funds for water and sanitation because they simply do not have the right staff to implement the resources that have been provided by donors. In this case, countries providing aid should focus on not only the numbers of wells drilled into the ground, but also on building the capacity of water sectors in developing countries so that they can use aid funds appropriately and develop the institutional know-how that will yield benefits long after donor funds have been utilized.

*Community Control- partners, not beneficiaries bring sustainability*

Through our programmatic experience, CARE has found that sustainable water and sanitation programs are those in which communities are involved in the design, implementation, management, maintenance, and monitoring and evaluation of results. This should be no mystery, as no one knows their needs better or has a greater stake in ensuring the sustainability of safe water and sanitation systems than the communities that rely upon them.

Our experience has also taught us that to the degree possible, resources should be concentrated at the local level. This not only encourages efficiencies, but often results in positive spill over effects like local level capacity building, the development of improved local governance and the fostering of local civil society, which has potential for a broader impact on governance.

*Sustainability- the end goal*

Ultimately, no effort to extend safe water and sanitation services will be effective unless it is sustainable in the long run. This entails making sure that the maintenance, management, and decision-making around water and sanitation projects can be executed by local actors. Capacity building at both the national and local levels and community involvement are key components in achieving sustainability.

I'd like to provide an example of what this looks like in practice. In 2004 CARE began a project in Mozambique to improve health and reduce poverty amongst 520,000 people in the Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces by increasing their access to safe water and sanitation. This project was designed not only to respond to the day-to-day needs of poor people but also to address some of the barriers that prevent wider and sustainable

access to safe water supply and sanitation. These barriers were identified through a dialogue involving a number of stakeholders including community members, donors, the private sector, and government at different levels.

The project engages poor communities in the management of their water resources, including financial management; promotes water use for small scale agriculture as well as domestic use; encourages the development and endorsement of a wider range of technologies so that communities have more choice; and works with government to improve the efficiency of contracting for construction of boreholes. The learning from these various activities is fed back to the stakeholders. The results and impacts of this project are expected to go beyond simple service provision and are designed to have a wider influence on the way the water sector operates in Mozambique.

### The US Response to the African Water Crisis

Tackling the constraints to the expansion of water and sanitation services that I have outlined will require the US government to increase the level of funding devoted toward these sectors. Funding must be targeted where it will have the greatest impact in dealing with the constraints. Doing so must include addressing underlying accountability and capacity issues and coordinating with other donor entities.

The Water for the Poor Act made the provision of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene an explicit objective of US foreign assistance and called for the State Department to develop a comprehensive strategy outlining how the US would go about expanding equitable access to water and sanitation in countries where the need is greatest. However, implementation of the Act has been limited and has not been backed by the increased appropriations required to realize the goals encompassed in it.

The passage of the Water for the Poor Act presents an opportunity around which the US can bring expertise gained through programs in other regions of the world and significantly expanded funding to bear in sub-Saharan Africa. The strategy required by the Act also helps address gaps in responding to the African water crisis. These include: designating high priority recipient countries toward which funding should be targeted; determining which of those countries are truly committed to instituting the necessary reforms and enhancing accountability to their citizens; developing a system of measurable goals, benchmarks and timetables for monitoring US foreign assistance; and coordinating assistance with other donor countries.

The US Government should also focus on complementary activities to strengthen civil societies', governments', and the media's capacity to scrutinize their water and sanitation sector and demand that money be used appropriately and effectively. This capacity building will benefit not only the country receiving aid by ensuring that water

and sanitation services are being delivered as they should be, but also the US as it will encourage the careful use of foreign assistance funds.

The US response to the African water crisis to date has been inadequate in relation to the scope of the problem and the impact that expanding access to water and sanitation services would have in addressing many other developmental challenges. Although the US government took an important step by passing of the visionary Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005, the current system of policies and institutions in place is not conducive to the US developing and implementing a shared, prominent and responsive agenda adequate to the task of making meaningful change in the water and sanitation sector in Africa.

The first State Department Water for the Poor Act Report, which was released in June of 2006, was extremely useful in understanding where and how US resources are being spent in the water and sanitation sector. However, it only met one of the seven broad requirements of the Act and focused on water resources as a whole, rather than exclusively on safe drinking water and sanitation as outlined in the legislation. The Report also provided a summary of current US water programming, rather than laying forth a comprehensive strategy.

The information presented in the Report revealed that in FY 2005, a bulk of US funding went to countries and regions of strategic interest (like Afghanistan, Iraq, and the West Bank and Gaza), while only roughly \$15 million in sustainable water supply and sanitation funding went to sub-Saharan Africa, indisputably one of the areas of greatest need. The Report also counted the amount spent in the emergency sector--which, depending on how you count, receives over 50% of total funding--toward what the US is spending on water and sanitation.

While funding relief efforts is essential to saving lives, and an activity that the US should continue to invest in, emergency spending will only go so far in addressing the issue of sustainable access to safe water and sanitation, particularly when there are limited funds for the transition from relief to development. There is no substitute to increasing funding for developmental water and sanitation, which is why the Water for the Poor Act explicitly called for the US to help "expand access to safe water and sanitation in an affordable, equitable, and sustainable manner."

The facts that have come to light with the release of the first State Department Water for the Poor Act Report indicate that US funding must be significantly increased to fill the gaps in addressing the water and sanitation needs of Africa and other under-served areas. Furthermore, they underscore the need to elevate water and sanitation as an explicit priority in order to truly realize the vision incorporated in the legislation.

Compounding these funding gaps is the issue of where water assistance lies within US foreign assistance agencies. The water sector continues to be fractured among various US agencies, and even within those agencies themselves. USAID is the lead US government entity for the provision of assistance for safe water and sanitation globally. The USAID responsibility for water and sanitation is shared between the Bureaus for Global Health and Economic Growth, Agriculture, & Trade (EGAT), meaning that safe water and sanitation has no dedicated staff (except in OFDA) and must compete with other priorities within those bureaus for funding and attention. While continued engagement on the part of the Department of State in convening an interagency working group on water and sanitation is highly welcome, the designation of a full-time, high-level staff member—like the Global AIDS Coordinator—would help resolve the issue of water being “lumped in” with other sectoral issues and give the sector the attention that it so desperately needs.

The new Foreign Assistance Framework developed over the course of the last year, which is the basis for developing country operational plans, includes water merely as a program level goal under the Investing in People objective. Recognizing that water and sanitation falls under several key objectives like Peace and Security, Economic Development and Improved Governance, but not determining provision of it to be an objective in its own right, contributes to the phenomenon of “water being everywhere and nowhere at the same time.”

The low-level priority given to water, as reflected by the fact that it has no “home” within the US policy and administrative hierarchy, is exacerbated by the current funding process, in which there is no accountability mechanism to ensure that the appropriations made for non-line item areas, like water, are spent in accordance with Congressional report language. In order for the vision of the Water for the Poor Act to be realized, we must ensure that *additional* resources—ones that can be tracked and accounted for—are being provided to fund developmental approaches to expanding access to water and sanitation services. A good start to this would be making sure that water and sanitation are given a specific line item within the Development Assistance account.

An integrated and robust approach to providing access to water and sanitation will enhance the impact of all US foreign assistance to Africa, including programs in education, HIV/AIDS, economic development and livelihood security. This fact reinforces the need to go beyond simply passing a landmark piece of legislation, like the Water for the Poor Act, to following through with its implementation. The Office of the Director of Foreign Assistance must move forward in fulfilling the Water for the Poor Act requirements of strategically prioritizing water and sanitation in areas of great need, like sub-Saharan Africa, and developing a method for coordinating and integrating assistance for safe water and sanitation with other US foreign assistance efforts. It is equally as important to the implementation of the Water for the Poor Act, that the US

government make bolder, additional investments in a sector that has been sidelined for far too long.