

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER CHALLENGES, GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT FROM SRI LANKA

W. B. G. Fernando¹

¹Deputy General Manager, National Water Supply and Drainage Board, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka being a member of United Nations is also determined to achieve Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation (MDG). Accordingly, the country should increase the water supply coverage to 90% and 100% respectively in 2015 and 2025. Although, the country has achieved a reasonable progress as 90% coverage by year 2010 but reaching the target of 100% coverage could not be achieved easily by year 2025. The objective of this paper is to present a brief account of various disparities, mitigation measures taken, their success and failures and recommendations for better results to achieve MDG on time.

Key Words: Access to Water, Millennium Development Goals, Urban and Rural water, Water Resources, Sustainability

1. BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka being a member of United Nations is also determined to achieve Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation. The country had improved water supply coverage at 80% in year 2000, when the MDG is announced. Accordingly it has to be increased to 90% & 100% respectively in 2015 and 2025. As per the joint Monitoring programme of WHO & UNICEF the country had achieved 90% coverage even by year 2010 [2]. Although above figures are encouraging, it merely does not imply that the 100% target will be easily achieved in year 2025. Generally covering the initial part of the gap was not difficult. However closing the balance will be quite difficult. On the other hand, disparities among various sectors have been further broadened avoiding equitable access of water for all in the society. The objective of this paper is to present a brief account of various disparities, mitigation measures taken, their success and failures and recommendations for better results. Being a developing country in South Asia, the lessons learnt from Sri Lanka will be of immense help to others.

2. WATER SUPPLY IN SRI LANKA

Out of 20.3 m population in Sri Lanka, about 35% are covered by 326 numbers large and medium scale water supply schemes which are maintained by National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) which is a government organization [1].

Community managed small scale rural water supply schemes numbering about 3600 cover about 8% of population. The rest is covered by Tube wells, dug wells and rain water. WHO/UNICEF JMP report states that although 98% of urban population has access to safe water in 2010 it is only 88% for rural population. Furthermore equitable access for water supply is not available throughout the country and especially disparities prevail in following areas.

1. Geographical disparities
2. Affordability Constraints
3. Vulnerable and marginalized groups

The above disparities are not independent and they are interrelated in many cases based on the cause and remedial measures.

3. DISPARITIES IN ACCESS AND MITIGATION MEASURES TAKEN

Not like in many other countries in Sri Lanka, NWSDB operates 97% of all major Water supply schemes (WSS) [1].

Only very few WSS are operated by local authorities. Hence responsibility of piped water mainly lies on NWSDB. Therefore NWSDB together with the Government has taken various

steps in order to address above disparities. Major steps are described below.

1. Provision of capital funds on grant/loan basis – Government provides full capital funds requirement for establishment of new major WSS. 50% of loans for urban areas and 15% for rural areas are only to be repaid. Hence NWSDB is not pressurized to recover full capital cost.
2. Provision of capital funds for community schemes on 100% grant basis.
3. Selection of areas for new WSS on a priority criterion where all disparities are seriously considered.
4. Covering of rural areas by simple and affordable techniques like protected dug wells, hand pump fixed tube wells and rain water harvesting is encouraged and a part of necessary funding is provided on grant basis.
5. Establishment of a strong back up support system to ensure sustainability of community managed schemes and provision of necessary assistance for tube well maintenance.
6. Implementing a comprehensive water quality surveillance system with the help of Health authorities.
7. Keeping the charges for new connections from WSS to a bare minimum and allowing paying initial charge on installment basis.
8. Water tariff structure is designed to ensure that life line requirement of water be provided at an affordable cost to all in the society. This tariff is further reduced for pro poor community.
9. Wherever possible urban poor living in shanties are provided with house connections at a very nominal fee. Others are continued to be provided water through public stand posts although it increases Non revenue water.
10. Marginalized groups specially, internally displaced persons are given high priority when new WSS are constructed.

4. CHALLENGES

There are number of challenges in providing equitable access of water and some of them are listed below.

1. Lack of autonomy for NWSDB
2. Government policy on island wide uniform tariff thereby preventing charging of an appropriate tariff for each and every scheme
3. External influences for selection of areas for new WSS
4. Lack of coordination with provincial council and local authorities
5. Lack of reliable water sources and water sharing issues
6. Unclear policy for relocating of urban poor

5. RECOMMENDATION

Sri Lanka is a developing country and hence has many priorities. Therefore the attention paid for provision of water may not be up to the required levels. However with the above steps it intends to minimize the disparities and achieve MDG on time.

6. REFERENCES

- [1]. National Water Supply and Drainage Board, Sri Lanka, "Co-operative Plan", 2012-2016.
- [2]. WHO – UNISEF- Joint Monitoring Program (JMP), "Progress of Sanitation and Drinking Water", 2010.