

EU NGO Response to the Proposal for a new Strategy for the Africa Component of the EU Water Initiative

Background

This paper responds to the Troika proposal for a new strategy for the Africa Working Group (AfWG), presented in Stockholm in August 2006. While we welcome the initiative to radically re-think the strategy of the group, we are concerned that close alignment of the AfWG with the Infrastructure Partnership may result with insufficient priority given to domestic water supply and sanitation, especially smaller systems. This paper sets out an alternative strategy for the AfWG, which seeks to operationalise commitments to achieving the MDG water supply and sanitation targets in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Principles guiding our alternative proposal:

1. **Open dialogue on policy options.** There is a need for a platform for donors, African governments, local authorities, (local) business and civil society in Europe and Africa to share, discuss and learn lessons from prevailing policy options for rural and urban WSS programmes, gain ownership and reached sustainable solutions. The conversation on policy content and design between development-partners should not be shaped by, linked to, limited by or even jeopardise future funding packages...
2. **Transparency.** There is a need to provide incentives, knowledge transfer and supportive peer pressure on donor governments and African governments to provide more detailed information about their investments in WSS, the effectiveness of these investments and the challenges associated with making investments effective. There needs to be regular reporting by governments on their WSS funding, investments and programmes, and opportunities to question and present independent information.
3. **Accountability.** There is a need for greater accountability within the development partnership of European donors and African governments; and an opportunity for the principal partners to understand any necessary remedial actions when promises (of funding on one hand, and action on the other) to each other are not kept.
4. **Participation.** The participation of adequate & informed representation from all major groups, especially civil society in Europe and Africa, and adequate representation from African local authorities and water / sanitation institutions is necessary to ensure, if the objectives of the AWG are to be achieved. It is also often necessary for participation to be supported in such a way as to strengthen the quality of participation.
5. **Coordination.** There is a big need for more donor coordination, preferably behind a government-led sector plan, especially in African countries that are most off-track in meeting the MDG targets for WSS. Donor and government coordination, strengthened through a sector-wide approach, could improve the effectiveness and impact of WSS investments.

From these principles, we maintain that the main added value of the EUWI AWG is the **dialogue** and the **sharing** of experiences, approaches and practices between EU and Africa, between States, local governments, civil society and other actors.

Problem analysis

We believe there are three priority problems facing the water and sanitation sector in Sub-Saharan Africa, which the Africa Working Group should aim to address, in order to contribute to achievement of MDG targets. These are the following:

1. **National and local sector investment and development plans.** Many African governments still need to develop their sector investment and development plans and programmes, which takes into account not just the financial resources necessary to expand coverage, but also the human resources required to sustain service provision. Such plans and programmes must be elaborated by the government with the involvement of representatives from local authorities, civil society organisations and local and national private sector. Absence of an investment and development plan prevents African governments from prioritising WSS in poverty reduction or national development strategies. This lack of prioritisation of these essential services is mirrored by stagnant or dwindling WSS aid from donors. Additionally, much WSS aid is not targeted at the most off-track countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, contributing further to the marginalisation of the WSS sector in those countries..
2. **Local government capacity to deliver and ensure sustainability, especially in rural areas.** Many African governments are in the process of decentralisation, devolving responsibility for WSS provision to local government authorities. Yet the human resource capacity of many local authorities is severely limited especially in rural areas where NGO and private sector capacity are also in short supply. In addition, financial flows from central to local governments are un-predictable. The sustainability of rural WSS services are therefore at stake. Part of the strategy therefore focus on empowerment and capacity building at local level,
3. **Capacity of citizens to hold government and provider to account.** African civil society and broader consumer action to demand expansion of WSS services to the un-served and improvements in quality of services is still nascent. Improving demand for services, as well as demand for information on progress, performance and investments, is in part dependent on the availability of transparent data on donor and government spending in the sector. Strengthening capacity to hold service providers to account is also the necessary, but missing element in urban utility reform programmes funded by donors.

The role of the Africa Working Group of the EU Water Initiative

The original proposal (August 2006) for the AfWG has three main components:

- 1) Integration of IWRM/TWM sub-group into the Infrastructure Partnership
- 2) Establishing a Water Policy Dialogue Forum under the Infrastructure Partnership with a political mandate to focus both on national WSS and IWRM/TM
- 3) Continuing country dialogues only where there is demand

We broadly agree that IWRM/TWM issues align well with the Infrastructure Partnership and that the sub group would benefit from integration. We are aware however, that in basic WSS service provision and management, there needs to be greater awareness of

and response to impacts and effects on water resources. This proposal focuses on parts 2 and 3 of the strategy – the Water Policy Dialogue Forum and the Country Dialogues. These components that should be undertaken by the AWG and maintained within the EUWI. This will ensure that issues of WSS are taken into consideration in the Infrastructure Partnership under the “guidance” of the AWG who is the “key holder” for access to water and sanitation, under the MDGs. A focus on a pro-poor approach must be maintained

Water Policy Dialogue Forum (WPDF)

We recommend that:

1. The WPDF remain outside the Infrastructure Partnership. The WPDF to serve as a political platform for promoting policy dialogue between African governments, the EU, local authorities and civil society. The platform would serve to:
 - a. Improve information flows on EU WSS aid volumes and targets, gaps and overlaps, with a view to ensuring that countries in Africa that are off-track their MDG targets receive priority funding. The WPDF, additionally, could serve as a forum to exert peer pressure on bilaterals and multilaterals to report more transparently on their expenditure on WSS / WRM in Africa and the quality of their expenditure, especially on strengthening donor coordination and harmonisation at country level.
 - b. Share information on, learn lessons from and review the impact of policy directions/options in WSS that African governments and/or donor governments are pursuing. Identify and agree where persistent issues arise and options on how to address these.
 - c. Monitor and report annually to the European Council on EU commitments to support progress in the water sector. In addition to financial commitments, this would include level of stakeholder participation, commitments to increase advisory capacity and develop local expertise and strengthening local accountability.
 - d. Coordinate support to African initiatives, including financial support to strengthening African coordination bodies, such as AMCOW and civil society water networks (e.g. ANEW).
 - e. Act as a lobby group to ensure that water and sanitation is sufficiently prioritised in all EU development policy and programming (Commission and Member States).
2. The WPDF should identify and develop joint action strategies for priority countries where assessments (arising from country dialogues or other mechanisms) show that injection of EU funds, technical assistance and capacity building is most needed to accelerate progress towards the MDG targets.
3. The WPDF should address operational as well as political issues. Operational issues arising from the country dialogues should be discussed in this forum, with a view to assessing whether joint actions can be pursued.

Institutional mechanism for the Water Policy Dialogue Forum

We agree that contracting out the secretarial services for the Forum to an independent organisation could provide it with the consistent quality of support necessary for organising the Forum meetings.

The Secretariat for the Forum will provide it with the muscle to ensure the Forum discussions and actions are followed through with consistent attention, and provide it with the energy to pursue initiatives where necessary - needs to be established by the European MS chairing the Forum, in collaboration with AMCOW TAC. The secretariat would need to ensure that there are robust mechanisms for identifying and catering to the different interests of the other stakeholders of the Forum. The Secretariat would be responsible for ensuring that there is regular reporting to the European Council on the activities of the Africa Component of the EUWI.

The Water Policy Dialogue Forum could meet twice a year: once in Europe, once in Africa, where one meeting could focus on the Policy dialogue (on options, lessons from policy implementation, etc), and the second focus on reporting on progress of investments, initiatives and programmes, including those undertaken jointly through the auspices of the Africa Component of the EUWI.

The preparation for the meeting will be undertaken with the collaboration of 2 member states, AMCOW, the EC, and 2 NGO's (1 European and 1 African). Results will be disseminated widely and discussed with SG EUWI and the Infrastructure Partnership.

Additionally, the Dialogue Forum and the Secretariat of the Africa Component of the EUWI could establish small working groups amongst its stakeholders to pursue more in-depth learning about specific themes. The information can then be shared and discussed during the Africa-based Forum meetings and/or during the annual EUWI multi-stakeholder Forum at Stockholm.

In order to make this work, funding should be set aside to make it possible for all stakeholders to play an active role.

Country Dialogues

We agree that Country Dialogues should be based on the explicit demand of a partner country. They have a role in countries where donor coordination is not well developed and in countries with weak national institutions. Requests for support should be addressed to the respective field missions. Funding decisions and support by EU MS and EC should be part of the negotiations and programming with national governments. Priority assistance to improve sector coordination, capacity building and planning needs to be aligned to these processes. In order to ensure close harmonisation with cooperation programmes on the ground, European participation in Country Dialogues needs to be led by the operational units of EC and EU Member States and to be part of joint programming where it is in place.

General recommendations

- In order to enable full participation of stakeholders, the EC must facilitate and finance participation of civil society organisations and that of local authorities (Europeans and Africans)
- Links to the political process have to improve, especially between the EUWI and the EC

- Links between EUWI and the EU Africa Partnership on Infrastructure have to be clarified and established.

NGO representatives of the SG and AWG would like to further discussions on this issue and other components concerning the AfWG asap through a meeting with the troika and the Commission. An AfWG meeting also needs to be organised to validate these issues before the end of November 2006.

This proposal was prepared by NGOs from the AWG and the SG of EUWI, and is supported by the following organisations:

Eau Vive, PS-eau, WaterAid, Tearfund , Women for Water Partnership, Freshwater Action Network, ANEW