Emerging Good Practice in Urban Water Projects

Democratic Republic of Congo: Urban Water Supply Project

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Project approval date: December 18, 2008

Project Objectives & Challenges

Poor governance and an absence of basic infrastructure seriously impede development in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Only 11.5 million people or 22 percent of the total population have access to safe water supply. Despite urban growth, the number of active connections and the quantity of water sold has decreased. In addition to low access rates, there is a significant accumulation of unpaid water bills, an inappropriate tariff structure and low cost recovery. Furthermore, the state water utility company – REGIDESO (the utility) lacks autonomy and suffers from overstaffing.

The project seeks to improve and expand water supply services in major urban centers, support sector reform, capacity building, and improved governance.

The project aims to increase access to water from 42 percent in 2008 to 55 percent in 2013, which would connect 1.2 million urban residents to safe water. In addition to private connections, the project will support 400 standposts in poor neighborhoods. The project will enable the utility's operation and maintenance costs to be fully covered through revenues by 2012.

Client Initiatives for Improved Governance in the Water Sector

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo developed a priority action plan in 2007, which stresses the need for water sector reform to improve access to water. The Government is committed to: (i) adopt an action plan to control and pay on time the water bills of public agencies; (ii) restructure the utility's balance sheet and the cancellation of debts; (iii) retrench redundant personnel in the utility; (iv) contract a professional operator to run the utility for five years under a management contract; and (v) transform the utility into a commercial company under the new legal framework concerning public enterprises.

Governance Measures Supported by the Project

Accountability

The project will support a five-year management contract of three focus cities by a professional operator. The operator will be tasked with improving operations, and redressing the finances. The contract should stipulate clear performance targets and transfer of know-how to utility staff. Two customer surveys will assess satisfaction and expected improvements during the management contract.
As part of the project, an action plan will be developed to ensure that public agencies pay their water bills, reduce their water consumption and that redundant personnel are retrenched. In addition, the project will seek to reduce governmental and managerial interference in order for the utility to regain autonomy.

**Transparency**
The project communication strategy puts emphasis on transparency, integrity and accountability of the institutions in charge. The strategy includes:

- Annual stakeholder information forums in Kinshasa and other large urban centers to assess the water sector as a whole, including investment, institutional reform and operational performance;
- Published articles in local press on key developments related to the project;
- Information to development partners on progress and results against stated objectives;
- Creation of a website for project related information, including: forecast estimates, timetables, bidding conditions, short lists of consultants, awards decisions, and contract completion reports.

**Participation**
The project sponsors intense public communication and awareness programs to ensure objectives and improvements targeted by the reform, to improve bill collection and to strengthen good governance in water sector. The utility is tasked with consulting the local population on appropriate locations for the public standposts to be sponsored by the project. The consultations will ensure that the standposts are sustained, and will assist in identification of local standpost managers for each site.

**Reference Documents and Contacts**


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