



Official coverage figures for rural water supply make us hopeful - MDG targets for water will likely be met. Yet, the disappointing reality is that only a fraction of this is functional and providing regular water supply that is safe for drinking. The premature deterioration of 'improved' water supply makes unreliable and unsafe water services a daily reality for large parts of the rural population in Asia.

**SNV recognises that providing functional and sustainable water supply services is a challenge that goes far beyond coverage at a given point in time. Increased capacity at all levels is essential for sustainability.**



## Creating solutions for functional rural water supply services

Rural water supply systems are typically designed with a lifespan of 15-20 years, but many need repair or rehabilitation within 3-4 years. Beyond maintenance and public investment efficiency issues, this is also an equity problem, as public resources repeatedly go to the same communities, bypassing the needs of more remote and marginalised communities.

Community management of rural water supply services is still the dominant approach in developing countries, but in many countries it has been equated with abandoning communities and their water supply systems after construction. This approach neglects the fact that communities develop over a water system's expected 20-year lifespan, with changing water demands and service management requirements.

It is clear that the lack of functionality in rural water supply cannot be solved sustainably through additional community workshops or quick rehabilitation. It requires a collaborative

effort to rethink the way the sector is organised in terms of investment, support and, of course, construction of rural water supply. In addition to national sector dialogue and alignment, clear opportunities for progress lie in sub-national WASH governance improvements. Improved planning, monitoring, support mechanisms and local benchmarking can make functional rural water supply a reality on the ground.

## Promoting water systems and building capacity

The issue of sustainability and functionality in rural water supply is not new. For more than 35 years the sector has been talking about ways to enhance sustainability of service. However, still too little emphasis has been given to the wider institutional setting in which "community management" takes place. Moreover, in many countries the rural water supply and sanitation sector is highly fragmented.

Through its Functionality approach, SNV supports local governments, water users' groups, the private sector and local NGOs to jointly develop practical examples of sustainable service delivery. We do not promote a specific model of service delivery, but rather build on existing models by:

- Creating greater professionalisation in rural water supply by capacity development and benchmarking of service providers
- Supporting improved provincial or district multi-stakeholder planning, targeting and monitoring to make local investment more transparent and rational
- Helping to set up, validate and strengthen institutional support mechanisms for community managed rural water supply
- Sharing local lessons learned at national level through participation in learning platforms and government-led sector development groups

## Benefiting people and communities

SNV's approach to Functionality of Rural Water Supply Services addresses the underlying causes behind the deterioration of services. This brings clear benefits to everyone involved including families, communities, local and national governments, and donors. Specifically, it helps achieve:

- Sustained access to rural water supply services that are functional for the intended life span of the system
- Institutional set-up that effectively supports and regulates implementation of WASH projects and operation of water services
- Rational, transparent and harmonised investment in rural water supply at provincial/district levels
- Increased influence of women, socially excluded groups and people living in poverty in the water and sanitation services planning and priority setting process

### About SNV

SNV is a non-profit international development organisation with headquarters in the Netherlands and staff in 35 different countries. For over 40 years, we have provided advisory services to national, regional and local governments, entrepreneurs and citizen associations to alleviate poverty. With over 900 technical advisors and 100 local teams around the world, we provide expertise in agricultural and forestry products, renewable energy, water and sanitation, governance and private sector development.

SNV builds strong networks across Asia by maintaining both national and district offices in Nepal, Bhutan, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia. We directly engage with key local organisations in diverse geographical settings, ranging from remote mountain provinces, to lower-lying and faster developing districts.



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