

From our water correspondent

Our new water correspondent is Laura Hucks from WaterAid in Tanzania.

Goodbye South London, hello Dar es Salaam! Day 2 in my new role as a Policy Adviser for WaterAid in Tanzania coincided with the annual joint sector review, so straight in at the deep end, still wet behind the ears, I took the plunge (enough watery metaphors) and made my way to the chosen hotel ... What a great way to be introduced to some of the challenges facing the water sector here. Tanzania now has the largest (SWAp) in sub-Saharan Africa, with all the accompanying architecture, including the joint sector review, which brings together a colourful cross-section of interested parties to discuss sector progress over a coffee and prioritize undertakings for the coming year.

The water sector here has undergone an ambitious reform programme and enjoys a high political profile. The government recognized water as a priority sector alongside education, health, agriculture and roads in the MKUKUTA (National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty) launched in 2005. This has led to significant increases

in sector finance over the past decade, with water spending quadrupling since 2000/01. But are more people gaining access to safe water supplies as a result?

The joint sector review was opened by the Minister for Water and Irrigation, followed by members of TAWASNET (the recently formed civil society network for water and sanitation) and the World Bank. It's great that local organizations are given the chance to report back on how they see implementation in areas remote from Dar es Salaam and the policy-making world. Some microphone testing and several Powerpoint presentations later, we were left with a mixed picture. There is no doubt that progress is being made as a result of the Water Sector Development Programme (WSDP). Although less than 46 per cent of Tanzanians in rural areas have access to safe water, the rate of increase in access is significantly faster than in other low-income countries, and the government should be congratulated.

But the benefits for Tanzanians have not been equitably spread. TAWASNET showed that the formula for ensuring

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fair allocations among districts based on population, poverty, existing access and hydrogeology has not been applied in a comprehensive way. Targeting at the district level is also poor, with new resources going to those communities who are already well served. TAWASANET is calling for greater transparency at both national and local level through the publication of expenditure plans. They also want to see clearer guidelines for local government staff.

Sustainability is another major challenge. How can we ensure that WSDP investments bring lasting benefits to Tanzanians? WaterAid's recent research, drawing on data from waterpoint mapping surveys, reveals that nearly half (46 per cent) of all public waterpoints in Tanzania are not functioning. The same survey found that, just two years after project completion, almost a quarter of new pumps were not functioning. Sustainability is not a new problem of course, but one which clearly needs urgent attention to ensure that money invested does not go down the drain. In his speech, the Minister also recognized the need to address non-functionality. We believe that as a first step district water departments must start

to provide increased support to communities. The World Bank's recent public expenditure review shows that recurrent expenditure is declining as a percentage of total expenditure. Although, at the district level, local governments plan to spend a proportion of their budget on operation, maintenance and rehabilitation, the Bank found that when funding is unpredictable, as it appears to be in Tanzania, and the available budget is less than expected, these expenditures are the first to be cut. A stronger role for the district in maintenance and rehabilitation must also be accompanied by more clarity around roles and responsibilities. TAWASANET is calling for a service charter for district water departments, setting out their obligations and those of the community-owned water supply organizations.

At the time of writing, the final undertakings are yet to be agreed upon. The challenge will be to synthesize the many voices, prioritize and focus on changes that are realistic and will have an impact. The government must take the lead but there was a strong sense of joint responsibility among sector actors to move things forward. More on this to follow!