

WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL (WSSCC)
NETWORK ON SERVICES FOR THE URBAN POOR
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE 4TH GLOBAL FORUM
MANILA, 3 TO 7 NOVEMBER 1997

1. BACKGROUND

The Network on Services for the Urban Poor, established at the Rabat Forum in September 1993, is the successor of the Working Group on Urbanization that was established two years earlier at the Oslo Forum, and whose conclusions were presented in Rabat. The Working Group's report to the Rabat Forum, recommending new approaches to service provision in low-income urban areas, was based on the analysis of a wide array of submissions from members. This information bank comprised many kinds of published and unpublished material, reflecting a vast body of experience. The Working Group's comprehensive report to the Rabat Forum was seen as a valuable tool for anyone working on peri-urban water supply and sanitation programmes.

Since Rabat, the group has operated as a network on Services for the Urban Poor, with a broad-based membership of professionals, sharing experiences and knowledge through workshops, the Voices from the City newsletter of the USAID Environmental Health Program (EHP), and e-mail. In the period leading up to the Barbados Forum in November 1995, the Network continued to develop and analyse the information bank. An updated report was presented to the Barbados Forum, adding the analysis of 200 more documents to the 400 that had been analysed before Rabat. The analyses showed positive trends in approaches to the provision of services to the urban poor, and led to recommendations on how the Network could direct its efforts towards advocacy and effective dissemination of its research outputs.

2. THE BARBADOS MANDATE FOR THE 1995-1997 PERIOD

At the Barbados Forum, it was considered that the Network's research activities had reached a satisfactory conclusion and that the Network should redirect its efforts towards advocacy and the effective dissemination of its research outputs. A crucial aspect of this was the need to involve other stakeholders in the Network, beyond the research institutions, non-governmental organizations, central government and external support agencies that constituted the bulk of its membership. It was felt that the people who are directly responsible for service provision had had marginal involvement in the work so far, and that, as a result, the advances in thinking that the Network had generated had had limited impact in the actual provision of services to the urban poor.

To overcome these limitations, the Network was asked to regionalize its activities, to hold sub-regional and country workshops, and to specifically target its efforts at water

utility and local authority staff, who would be in a position to apply its findings. It was also considered that the Network should prepare a standard version of its findings in English, and also seek to publish them in French, Spanish and Portuguese.

3. THE CONSTRAINTS IN THE 1995-1997 PERIOD

The Barbados decisions, to be fully implemented, would have required a significant commitment of funds from the Network's donors. Unfortunately, the 1995-1997 period coincided with a difficult period for Italian development aid and UNCHS (Habitat), the Network's traditional supporters.

The funding constraints have meant, for example, that it was not possible to translate the Network's findings. A new consolidated English edition was prepared, but much more would need to be done for its dissemination to a wider public, and for the publication of the material in other languages. However, in spite of the funding difficulties, the Network did manage to apply part of the Barbados recommendations, and to organize advocacy and dissemination activities that have led to increasing application of its findings in the field. A summary of these activities is given below.

4. THE RECIFE INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON URBAN POVERTY (March 1996)

In March 1996, as part of the preparations for the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, which took place that same year in June, an international meeting on urban poverty was held in Recife, Brazil. The Recife meeting, which gathered 130 participants from 35 countries, representing all the world's regions, was considered one of the most important events ever held on urban poverty. Participants included government ministers, mayors, external support agency staff, researchers, central and local government staff, NGO and community representatives. The Recife Declaration, which was adopted unanimously by the participants, is an innovative document, focusing on the sweeping changes of attitude and outlook, on the part of agencies and individuals involved in anti-poverty programmes, that would be needed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of such programmes. The Declaration was very well received at the Habitat II Conference, which called for the establishment of a mechanism to ensure continuity to the mechanism that was set in motion in Recife. This mechanism, called the International Forum on Urban Poverty, will have its inaugural Conference in Florence, Italy, in November 1997, soon after the Manila Forum.

The Network played a key role in organizing the Recife meeting, which was attended by some of its most active members. Recife had a working group session devoted to access to water supply and environmental sanitation and other basic services, which helped to firmly establish water and sanitation as one of the key components of an effective urban poverty reduction strategy.

5. THE WATER RESEARCH COMMISSION CAPE TOWN PROJECT

The Water Research Commission (WRC) of South Africa, one of the Network's Core Group members, teamed up with the Network in sponsoring a successful workshop on computer-aided visualization techniques for informal settlement upgrading, in July 1995. Soon afterwards, a group of South African professionals attended the Network-

sponsored International Seminar "Challenges of the Informal Town", held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in September 1995. These exchanges have led to the launching of a WRC-sponsored research project in Cape Town, to look at the possibility of locally replicating the Network's approaches, which are being successfully used in Latin America. The activities are being carried out by the Urban Management Research Group of the University of Cape Town (UCT), with support from the City of Cape Town. The research project, which is now approaching its conclusion, has indicated that replication is indeed possible. It has also suggested adaptations to the specific conditions of South Africa. A pilot project for the application of the methodology in two informal settlements in Cape Town (Kanana and New Rest) is now being formulated, with the support of UCT, WRC, UNCHS (Habitat), UNDP and the City of Cape Town.

6. THE SABESP "SANEAR SAO PAULO" PROGRAMME

Following two workshops organized in August 1996 by the Network at SABESP, the mammoth Sao Paulo water utility, the "Sanear Sao Paulo" programme was formulated and launched. SABESP staff who attended the workshops ranged from a Vice-President to dozens of field managers working in crucial areas of the Greater Sao Paulo (population 18 million, at least 30% of whom live in low-income settlements). It is felt that Sao Paulo's critical mass is such that a successful programme there could show the way and influence many other cities to extend service provision to the urban poor. The "Sanear Sao Paulo" programme is a serious attempt to make an impact on the present situation, which is critical, through a series of integrated upgrading schemes in squatter settlements ("favelas") and illegal subdivisions. A key feature of the programme is the fact that it is adopting, in a bid to ensure sustainability, an integrated approach to environmental infrastructure provision, which encompasses water supply, sanitation, stormwater drainage and solid waste management. This is consistent with the Network's findings, and it represents a breakthrough for SABESP, which so far has dealt exclusively with water supply and sanitation.

7. THE EAST AFRICA URBAN SANITATION WORKSHOP (May 1997)

The UNDP/World Bank Regional Water and Sanitation Group for Eastern and Southern Africa has organized, in partnership with the Network, a sub-regional workshop on peri-urban sanitation in Nairobi, in May 1997. The workshop was attended by teams of participants from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, as well as representatives from research institutions and external support agencies. The concept of the country teams was meant to encourage a continuation of the work in the aftermath of the workshop, especially considering that participants are likely to take part in the formulation and implementation of forthcoming investment programmes in peri-urban sanitation in their own countries. The next step should be the organization of country workshops, building on the country teams that have been established.

8. PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMME FORMULATION IN CARACAS AND RECIFE

The Network's findings are being used to underpin the formulation of two large World Bank-funded investment programmes aimed at the upgrading of low-income settlements, in Recife, Brazil, and Caracas, Venezuela. In both cities, close to half of the population lives in underserved informal settlements, which have only recently

become a focus for public investment. An integrated approach to the provision of environmental infrastructure is being adopted, including water supply, sanitation, stormwater drainage and solid waste collection and disposal.

9. THE POST-MANILA PERIOD

The implementation of the Barbados recommendations has been limited, and the task ahead remains immense. The rapid pace of urbanization, and the slow progress in extending sustainable water and sanitation coverage to the urban poor, if anything have compounded the problem in recent years. However, the difficulties in securing funding through the Network's traditional channels have led to a drop in the effectiveness of the central coordinating mechanism in the 1995-1997 period. In this context, the group has taken note of Mr. Ivo Imparato's wish to leave the Network's leadership. Mr. Imparato, who has coordinated the Urbanization Working Group from 1991 to 1993, and the Network on Services for the Urban Poor from 1993 to 1997, feels that a new setup could enable the Network to gain access to new support mechanisms that would enable it to face up to the challenge that lies ahead. It seems particularly important to find support for regional and sub-regional dissemination activities.

The arrangement that seems to find favour with most members is that the Network would become a topic network, under the same title of "Services for the Urban Poor", within the GARNET framework. The focal point for the activities would be CERFE, the Rome-based research institution that played the role of Secretariat to the WSSCC Working Group on Urbanization, and later to the Network on Services for the Urban Poor. Within CERFE, the likely focal point for the activities would be Ms. Francesca Marta.

Discussions on the arrangements for the continuation of the Network's activities will be held during the Manila Forum, so that the Council may reach a decision in Manila. The implementation of the Barbados recommendations would continue to be the priority of the Network, with emphasis on the organization of sub-regional workshops, and on the translation and dissemination of the Network's findings.