



COMMITTED TO WATER FOR THE WORLD.

The right to water and sanitation: a public responsibility and an act of civic solidarity

If the right to water and sanitation is to be effective, then the obligations of all stakeholders must be clarified and guaranteed, including in terms of financing.

- As part of their policy of decentralisation, **the States** organise water and sanitation services at the most appropriate territorial level.
- **The users** contribute to the cost of the services and to water solidarity actions (town/country, rich/poor, etc.).
- **The public authorities** include the right to drinking water and sanitation in their internal legislation and ensure that there is compliance. They identify those who do not have access to these services and determine their needs. They adopt and implement a priority action and investment plan for gradual development of these services. They ensure that these measures are financed by the users (prices), the public budget (taxes) and, as applicable, international solidarity (transfers).

In 2008, nine African states in the Niger River Basin signed an international agreement to guarantee implementation of the right to water, in particular through fees and taxes. With the support of the international community, these States undertook to take "all measures to protect human and animal health against pollutants and water-borne diseases".

Promoting the right to water and sanitation on the international stage

Between the World Water Forum in Mexico and the Istanbul Forum, recognition of the right to water has progressed both on the international stage and within many countries. The right to water now appears on the agenda of inter-governmental discussions. It is important to continue along this path and above all to ensure that it is indeed effectively implemented.

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MAKING ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION AN EFFECTIVE RIGHT FOR ALL

Three priorities:

- To clarify the responsibilities of each player, from State to beneficiary
- To translate political will into national strategies and coasted action plans
- To set up long-term financing mechanisms

Improving access to water and to sanitation for all means going a step further than just hollow declarations and plans with no funding.

Implementing realistic action plans with the support of all stakeholders requires:

- the creation of an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework specifying the obligations of each party;
- the development of local initiatives involving current and future users in the decision-making process;
- reinforcing the capabilities of the local stakeholders;
- fair sharing of costs so that the prices are affordable to each user category.



To be accessible to all, particularly the poorest, public water and sanitation services must be efficient, facilitate local initiatives and obtain a contribution from everyone in order to cover the cost of the service.

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation involves setting up sustainable services and actions to promote hygiene. To do this, there are 5 intervention priorities.

Listen to what the beneficiaries want

Any water and sanitation project must respond to an analysis of the demand, based on socio-economic studies taking account of each segment of the population (age, sex, income bracket, etc.).

Define national strategies as frameworks for action nationwide

National water and sanitation strategies translate political will into concrete action, clarify the role of each player and define the action to be taken. Thus they enable the various approaches and interventions by the different stakeholders to be harmonised, public and private energies to be pooled and financing for the sector to be mobilised.

In Mali, a dynamic national policy to meet the challenge of sanitation for all.

Following a commitment made in 2005, the government of Mali has begun to formulate national policies and strategies for sanitation jointly with all stakeholders.

Building local strategies by mobilising all local stakeholders

Local authorities have a key role to play in implementing and improving local public water and sanitation services. Each local authority should determine its own strategy jointly with all local stakeholders, in response to the demand from and needs of the populations. Small local private operators who, in many situations, serve a large part of the population, must be closely involved in implementing this strategy.

In Dschang, Cameroon, a strategy for improving services

In 2006, the town of Dschang, together with all stakeholders, defined a water and sanitation strategy. It mobilised its decentralised cooperation partners (City of Nantes, Nantes Métropole and the International Association of French-speaking Mayors, with the support of the Loire-Brittany Water Agency) in order to bring about a real improvement in access to drinking water and sanitation services for all.

Adopting a legislative and regulatory framework specifying relations between the various parties

To ensure tasks are well distributed, the responsibilities of the various public authorities, service managers and users must be clarified. To be effective, this collaboration could rely on a system of contracts. A national regulatory mechanism must guarantee good governance of the services.

Setting up financial mechanisms ensuring recovery of costs and fair access to services

If the services are to be sustainable, then at least the operating costs must be recovered from the users themselves. Pricing policy must aim for fairness to allow access to the services for the poorest, at an affordable price.

The sanitation situation in France

More than 99% of homes are already served by water networks. Drinking water is of excellent quality in the towns and cities, but still needs to be improved in certain rural areas. The fight against diffuse pollution (lead, nitrates, pesticides) has made progress. On-site sanitation concerns about 20% of homes. Collective sanitation concerns the remaining 80% and will soon be up to standard in all towns and cities, at a time when more than 95% of wastewater is sent to treatment plants. Therefore efforts still need to be made. Water and sanitation budgets have been boosted and a new water act clarified the respective responsibilities of all parties, taking account of the diversity of situations encountered.

The right to water and sanitation in France

International action initiated by the UN Human Rights Council on the questions of access to water and sanitation are supported by France. It has signed up to major international obligations concerning access to water and sanitation (European Union directives, Water and Health Protocol) and its Constitution now contains a provision whereby: "Everyone has the right to live in an environment that protects health".

In France, the underprivileged who have "water debts" receive help from a public/private fund, the housing solidarity fund (more than 50,000 cases per year).

Following the World Water Forum in Mexico, the new French Water Act of 2006 further improved access to water and sanitation services for individuals and families in difficulty and who were experiencing problems with paying their water bills. Depending on their particular circumstances, the communes¹ have to find equitable solutions for sharing the costs of the services among all, through pooling of resources, fair pricing and solidarity fees.

1. Smallest administrative subdivision administered by a mayor and a municipal council.