POLICY BRIEF: WHEN IS INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RELEVANT TO WSUP?

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This policy brief outlines whether and when integrated water resource management (IWRM) is relevant to WSUP (Water Supply for the Urban Poor). IWRM is internationally recognised as a good idea, but it can seem to be a confused concept, to both to policy makers and practitioners. It is really a synergy of sustainability, good water management, equity and collaboration, but it is criticised for lacking an operational definition and failing to sustain lasting change. For an overview of IWRM refer to "Pragmatic but Principled"[1] (Heath, 2010[i]). This brief reviews the situations when IWRM is relevant to water supply and sanitation services in peri-urban areas, outlines why the process of IWRM is generally not relevant to WSUP then summarises the benefits of incorporating the principles into WSUP's work and how to do this.

IWRM is sometimes relevant to WSUP projects:

- If **there is a localised water resource** (e.g. small aquifer) WSUP need to ensure the local partners understand how they impact the resource and assess its sustainability, setting up management structures to protect the resource, deal with conflict and manage the supply. WaterAid and Oxfam[ii] have developed a process for community water resource management that can be used as a guide.
- If **water shortages are predicted** for the region, and increasing collaboration and participation will be central to reducing conflict. WSUP should support IWRM processes as the poorest are often the hardest affected, although domestic supplies are generally protected and for large resources WSUP is rarely involved with the resource management. For example in Antananarivo during the dry season there is often insufficient water for irrigation and industry but drinking water supplies are guaranteed
- If WSUP are **capacity building the regulators and the institutions responsible for managing water resources**. They need to encourage them to be proactive in collaborating with all the stakeholders, ensure they engage in IWRM dialogues and get them in contact with the regional Global Water Partnership representative[iii]
- If **WSUP are representing disempowered water users**. WSUP will often be working with marginalised groups who are overlooked or excluded from water resource dialogues. WSUP should engage with these groups to represent their viewpoints, though this will often be done during the implementation of the project. For example WSUP have represented the peri-urban communities in Naivasha (Kenya) during discussions about Lake Naivasha

However, IWRM is often not relevant to WSUP because:

1. **WSUP work with the urban poor** who only require a minimal proportion of the water available and typically have onsite sanitation. Therefore they have little impact on water resources - IWRM can be more relevant for larger utilities who provide large volumes and

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[1] Critical review of the background and theory of IWRM, how it is implemented, and how it is relevant to the supply of drinking water and sanitation, urban areas and low income countries.

sewage (domestic demand can be significant during the dry season and wastewater discharges can have a significant impact on water resources)

2. **WSUP aren't mainly involved with the water regulators/managers of the resource.** IWRM focuses upon governments and regulators. The majority of reports are for governments (local and national) and regulators, and there is little information to support IWRM for local water service providers in peri-urban and informal areas. WSUP principally work with utilities and community organisations that usually have their abstractions and discharges managed and determined by other organisations. The exception is localised resources on which the abstractions and discharges for the urban poor may have significant impacts

3. **There is no clear operational definition for IWRM.** The meaning of IWRM is vague, it is described as good water management, but what this actually means in the WSUP context is unclear. Therefore WSUP should focus on doing what they understand as good water resource management, but with more emphasis on collaboration.

4. **It's not an appropriate use of resources.** WSUP are not the appropriate organisation to provide the training or facilitate the process, they don't have experience of IWRM and aren't involved with government level institutions, in addition the benefits to the urban poor would be marginal

5. The benefits of IWRM are fiercely contested; donors are more interested in water safety plans and IWRM reportedly doesn't work in informal settings

In summary, the process of IWRM is generally not very useful to WSUP, but the principles are. The principles have been converted into benchmarks to measure water management and environmental sustainability, developing an audit tool[iv] to assess water resources and project management – the tool emphasises better water management in the slums, not the process of implementing IWRM. This can be used independently, but it will be more effective if incorporated into the WSUP scoping assessment of projects.

For the situations when IWRM is relevant, the most pragmatic approach is to apply "light IWRM", applying the principles at the project level (Heath, 2010). This should bring about meaningful stakeholder participation, community resource management and bring together the key partners to improve the safety of the water. Applying the environmental sustainability audit will help establish a basic framework for addressing the issues. In addition, tools are outlined in Heath 2010 and WSUP should consider implementing Water Safety Plans[v]. These provide a framework for identifying the risks to the water supply from catchment to consumer and should identify the specific risks to the water supply associated with the above situations. Water Safety Plans are much more relevant to WSUP than exploring any IWRM process, as they specifically address water supply.

[i] Heath, T (2010), Pragmatic but Principles: Background Report on Integrated Water Resource Management. Cranfield University

[ii] Oxfam And Wateraid (2010) Water Resource Management Collaboration: Draft Concept Note

[iii] Global Water Partnership – Regional Websites www.gwp.org

[iv] Heath (2010), Environmental Sustainability Audit . Cranfield University
[v] Bartram J *et al.* (2009). *Water safety plan manual: step-by-step risk management for drinking-water suppliers.* Geneva, World Health Organization Available: www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publication_9789241562638/en/index.html