

6. ACCESS FOR ALL: THE NEED FOR SOLIDARITY* AMONG WATER USERS

In Europe, 41 million people do not have access to safe drinking water and 85 million lack access to basic sanitation. But, access to water is a basic human right. So, the burden of provision must be shared fairly among people, regions and even countries, through the principle of "solidarity" —actions based on people's belief that they have a duty to help their fellow human beings. Solidarity mechanisms involve all players in society including governments, local authorities, civil society groups, private companies and multilateral institutions.

Many successful solidarity mechanisms already exist in Europe. Within countries, fair distribution of services and costs is brought about by general taxation, higher tariffs for richer (or urban) areas and businesses, and 'safety-net' schemes to provide water-cost subsidies to the poor. Between countries, solidarity mechanisms already in place include EU-financed investments in new Member States and the funding for overseas development provided by EuropeAid and the European Water Initiative. Other examples include the work of water-focused charities, donations of funds and expertise through the twinning

of towns, and donations of time, money and expertise by European water companies and their employees.

Although national and local governments are responsible for developing water and sanitation systems, international solidarity actions should support and add to these initiatives.

The European context

Worldwide, 1.6 billion people lack access to safe water, and 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation⁵, figures the world aims to halve by 2015 by means of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Closer to home, and despite the wealth of technology and expertise available in Western Europe, 41 million people in Europe do not have access to safe drinking water and 85 million lack access to basic sanitation. As a result, more than 13 500 children die in Europe every year due to poor water conditions⁶.

Part of the reason for this paradox⁷ is the fact that the situation in the countries that used to be part of the former Soviet Union is more critical than many statistics show. Much of the infrastructure built during the Soviet regime is now falling into disrepair, and there is barely enough money available to cover operational costs, let alone repair and maintenance. The result is that many people are only supplied with water for part of the day (see Figure 1).

The situation is so severe that, in some cases, the only way to ensure a safe water supply for all is to back-track, abandoning the dysfunctional infrastructure and turning to more basic solutions. In Georgia, for example, where 50% of the population lives below the poverty line and 17% in extreme poverty, a study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) concluded that the MDGs' water targets can only be achieved if existing urban infrastructure is scaled back —resulting in about 5% of the urban population being served through municipal stand pipes instead of in-house connections⁸.

So, there is an urgent need both to provide new access and to ensure the sustainability of existing infrastructure. This chapter argues that, if we do not wish to see the gap between rich and poor widen even further, we must develop mechanisms for solidarity to ensure (1) that water

* The term "solidarity" is used to describe the notion of actions that are undertaken out of a sense of duty to help one's fellow human beings, based on a general notion of fairness and justice. Note also that this chapter does not look at such actions in the context of natural disasters.

⁵ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme

⁶ WHO Regional Office for Europe, http://www.euro.who.int/watsan/Issues/20050712_1.

⁷ Raymond Jost (2005) Solidarity and Water Management: The European Paradox. Solidarité Eau Europe.

⁸ OECD (2005).

Continuity of Service

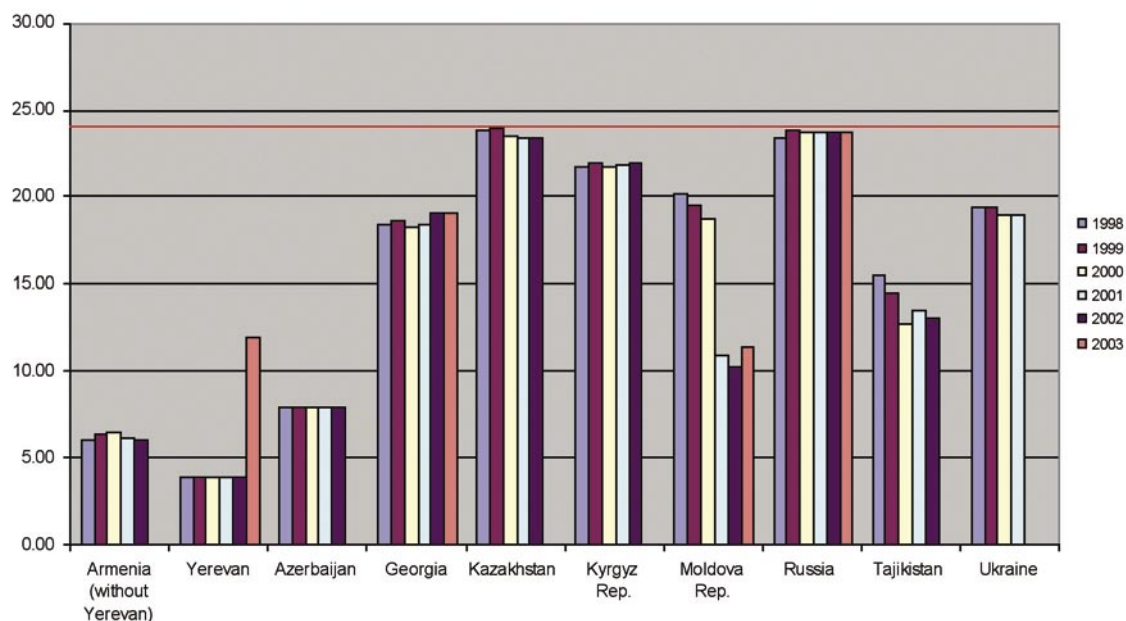


Figure 1. Continuity of water supply (average hours' supply per day). Source: EAP Task Force Water Utility Performance Indicator Database.

resources are better managed (so ensuring access to water and sanitation for all), and (2) that the basic needs of food, health, education, housing and security are met both within Europe and in the rest of the world.

Why is solidarity needed?

Infrastructure is expensive to install. So it represents a long-term investment, the price of which may need to be carried by two or three generations of users. Plus, the maintenance and provision of sustainable services incurs on-going costs, and expertise is needed to effectively manage them. Disparities between countries, in terms of their financial and management capacities, lead to disparities in water and sanitation coverage. Inconsistencies can also exist within a country (even those where water and sanitation coverage is considered to be close to 100%), as rural areas are often less well-served. And, the huge investment required to comply with national regulations can be too large for local water-users to afford. Moreover, where infrastructure is in place, the poor can find themselves caught in a downward spiral of unpaid bills and increasing debt, facing the risk of losing essential services such as their water supply.

Yet the right to water has been recognised by the UN⁹, giving rise to the principle that the cost of water must not



Guillaume Aubourg, pS-Eau.

French water engineers using their paid leave to rehabilitate water supply capacities in Gumri, Armenia. This capacity building work is a good example of solidarity between individuals, companies, not-for-profit agencies and local water authorities.

⁹ In 2002, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognised water as a human right. Forty-two European countries are signatories to this International Covenant.

be a barrier to providing access to water. Thus, this cost must be shared fairly between rich and poor, through the principle of solidarity¹⁰. It is this principle that underlies the call for actions in water and sanitation, which can be implemented on different levels, ranging from the national to the global.

Solutions do exist, as the work presented during the *European Water Solidarity Week* (Strasbourg, 15-21 October 2005) confirms¹¹. Indeed, arrangements reflecting the solidarity principle have already developed in different countries in different ways, and they clearly give added value to people in both the North and the South since such voluntary actions would not otherwise occur.

These approaches must be recognised and promoted in more countries and communities. Plus, within Europe, water-management partners must continue to develop innovative forms of solidarity among people and among local authorities, drawing on alternative and decentralised forms of financing and mobilising water users, elected representatives and decision-makers. This would make a significant contribution to achieving the Millennium

Development Goals in water and sanitation, both within Europe and beyond.

Implementing solidarity systems in water and sanitation

Key to the success of solidarity schemes is the role played by local authorities, who provide or oversee the provision of water and sanitation to their constituents¹². The different types of solidarity mechanisms explored below all rely on strong local commitment and responsibility.

Local management of water and sanitation services means that the providers are closer to the users. Providers can also better identify what technologies are appropriate locally and understand and respond to users' needs and people's ability to pay. Finally, they can also deal better with environmental constraints and identify and implement economical mechanisms for reaching the poor and covering costs in a sustainable manner. However, the funds and expertise needed to manage and maintain effective and efficient water and sanitation service are often lacking at the local level. Solidarity mechanisms,

In Brazil, supported by their employers, the employees of a French water company are using their paid leave to provide the poor with access to clean water.



Aquassistance, France.

¹⁰ Gentilini, M. in preface to Smets (2005), *Le Droit à l'Eau dans les Législations Nationales*.

¹¹ Report on European Water Solidarity Week, <http://www.s-e-e.org/>

¹² CEMR (2005) Declaration by the European des décisions et des financements.

Solidarity within a country –an example

France is divided into six "river basin territories", each containing 4 to 18 million people whose needs are served by numerous independent water authorities. When one local water authority needs to finance new water infrastructure, it is heavily subsidised by all the water users in its "basin territory". But, users in large rich cities (e.g. Paris) pay 2.8 times more than those in municipalities with low populations (10 000 inhabitants). Furthermore, users in poorer municipalities (with less than 400 inhabitants) aren't charged these levies (about 20% of the national population). Basically, this means that users from the wealthiest part of the Seine Normandy basin (60% of the basin population) actually subsidize the water investments which benefit those users living in the poorest parts of the basin (40% of the total population).

which share experience and knowledge at a local level, can provide both the financial and the capacity-building solutions needed to address people's water needs.

Country level –sharing the financial burden Solidarity between local users within a catchment or basin area

Tariff systems can be used to spread the costs of infrastructure and operations equally among users. Water authorities, for example, frequently apply the same water rates to everybody in the area they supply. This means that individual water users whose water or sanitation services are more costly than the average (because their homes are far from the rest of the community for instance) do not pay more than their neighbours. But, distinctions can be drawn between domestic and professional use, ensuring that large consumers (such as industry and agriculture) pay more per cubic meter than small consumers. Such systems do need to be carefully thought through however. Even seemingly simple systems such as charging according to the quantity of water consumed can penalise the poor, who often have large or extended families.

Solidarity between populations in different areas

Where water is managed by local authorities, the averaging effect of water rates can only be applied locally. However, it's also possible to apply the solidarity principle on a larger geographical scale if national and local authorities work together to share responsibility and pool their financial capacities. This can help to even out costs between rural and urban areas or between cities with good infrastructure and those whose infrastructure needs upgrading. These systems can be set in place at the national or regional level by, for example, imposing discretionary levies on water bills according to location, consumption volume, etc. Both national and local authorities have a vital role to play in setting up such systems to ensure fair service distribution.

Solidarity between citizens through the public budget

In any country, the main "solidarity system" is the system of taxation, which provides the national government

"Safety net" solidarity schemes

The UK's Anglian Water Trust Fund was set up to help those "in conditions of need, poverty, hardship or distress", and aims to significantly and sustainably improve "the quality of life throughout the Anglian Water region". The trust fund provides grants to help individuals and families in need whose water and sewerage charges are in arrears. Grants have also been made to voluntary sector organisations, to develop financial advice services and education projects. Over the past ten years, the Fund has provided a total of £12.2 million (€17.9 million) in grants to people in great need. Inspired by this initiative, the EOS Foundation was set up in March 2004 in the UK. Six UK water companies contribute to this fund, which also offers grants to pay the water debts of those in need.

For more information see www.awtf.org.uk and www.eosfoundation.org.uk.

In Hungary, the municipality of Budapest, social welfare bodies, NGOs and public service utilities have joined forces to set up a similar fund (the "Network Foundation"). Again, this provides financial aid to poor water users and helps them to manage their finances better.

For more information see www.vizmuvek.com.

with a budget to provide services and infrastructure to its citizens. It is important to ensure that the appropriate financial resources and political authority are then granted at a local level, to ensure that local authorities can provide water and sanitation services.

Solidarity with people in critical situations

Sometimes, though infrastructure is sufficient, some people in an area can't afford to pay for water services. Solidarity schemes can be used to help these individuals. Such schemes can be managed either by social administrations or they can be managed and financed by water operators, whether public or private, via solidarity funds.

These examples highlight the importance of local commitment. Those who are closest to the user and can listen to their needs and must have the power and capacities necessary to offer financial aid, alleviate poverty and bring water and sanitation to all.

Between countries – sharing expertise and experience, and providing funding

Institutional solidarity within Europe and beyond

While Europe remains committed to stepping up the support it provides to extremely poor regions of the world, as shown by the call to double aid to Africa, cooperation within Europe is also being recognised as a way of addressing the urgent and severe water needs of people in many European countries. So, at the level of the European Union, solidarity is being shown through the funding of huge investment programs in the new Member States (via "cohesion funds") and in potential future Member States (via ISPA funds). These are designed to help water authorities in these countries to quickly build the water infrastructure that will allow them to comply with water-related EU regulations.

When used to finance water projects, bilateral and multilateral official development assistance (ODA) constitute another kind of cross-border solidarity. In fact, Europe as a whole is by far the largest provider of ODA in the water sector, contributing US\$1.5 billion per year on average between 2001 and 2004. As well as providing multilateral funding at the country level, the European

Union also targets funds directly at local players such as local authorities and NGOs through the EuropeAid Cooperation Office. This provides another source of funds for water and sanitation projects. The European Water Initiative (EUWI), launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, emphasises water-sector cooperation between the European Commission, EU Member States and partner countries. As one output of the EUWI, the European Water Facility has made €500 million available specifically for water and sanitation projects in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

Through the work carried out under the framework of the Environmental Action Programme Task Force, the OECD highlights the need for capacity building to improve governance and simultaneously supports government authorities and utilities in the European region. This includes the provision of support for legal and institutional reforms as well as the provision of assistance to improve the financial situation of the water sector.

Solidarity through cooperation between local authorities

Decentralised actions also provide a source of funding for water and sanitation projects. This can be in the form of local-level cooperation between local authorities, which is provided with the support of local constituents. The long-standing practice of "twinning" towns in different countries has, for instance, led to the building of ties of solidarity across borders. The system means that local authorities in developed countries can support the authority they are twinned with, by providing funding and training and by sharing experience.

But, twinning isn't the only way forward. European networks of local authorities also exist, such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. These could be developed to provide an arena for experience-sharing, training and reflection. These types of solidarity mechanism have been the subject of specific study¹³ and will be the focus of a session at the 4th World Water Forum, Mexico. This session ("Solidarity and decentralised forms of North/South and South/South funding") will discuss the characteristics and advantages of such initiatives.

¹³ PS-Eau (2005) Solidarity financing. When water users in the North finance access to water and sanitation for users in the South.



Aquassistance

Using only a very small fraction of the funds raised by charging water users, French water suppliers are able to support overseas development projects like this one in Niger, by providing both funds and expertise.

France: legislation promoting solidarity between countries

In France the "Santini-Oudin Law", a landmark piece of legislation passed on February 9, 2005, permits water agencies and the public local authorities responsible for water and sanitation to dedicate up to 1% of their water and sanitation budgets to international development projects. Potentially, this represents up to €100 million per year in funding for water and sanitation projects. However, the added value of this form of solidarity lies not just in the funding it generates, but also in the fact that it is based on the "twinning" model. So, the water agencies and local authorities do not only give money. They can also get involved in the projects directly, share experience, and build capacities and ties of solidarity between water users in France and those in developing countries.

The potential for such solidarity actions is clear. In 2005, the six French basin agencies committed approximately €4.5 million in grants and €1.2 million in technical assistance to 22 projects operated by French NGOs and local governments in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The Paris area public water and wastewater services (SEDIF, SIAAP, City of Paris, serving about 8.3 million inhabitants) committed about €1.2 million in grants to water projects in developing countries in 2005; this solidarity with regard to water and sanitation projects represented less than €0.4/user (or €0.006/m³): about 0.2% of their total tariffs. Following the passing of the Santini-Oudin Law, this form of decentralised cooperation is expanding and a public questionnaire revealed in September 2005 that about 76% of the Seine Normandy water users (18 million) would agree to a 1% increase in their bills to contribute to MDG water projects in poor countries.

As part of its actions to support international development, the Greater Lyon Council has set up a "Solidarity Fund for Water" in partnership with one of its water suppliers. This initiative is intended to finance the construction of infrastructure that will improve the access that the poorest have to water and sanitation. To this end, the council has been involved in decentralised cooperation with Balti, the second-largest town in Moldavia, for several years. Following actions to appraise Balti's drinking water system, donations of equipment, and visits by Moldavian local council members and technicians to Lyon, a programme is currently underway to modernise Balti's drinking water system and €120 000 euros have been dedicated to the project.

Solidarity instigated by social society

Local-level solidarity can also take the form of water-focused charities and associations which raise funds specifically for local-level water and sanitation projects. These actions build on the ties of solidarity between water users.

Italian examples of solidarity

In Italy, the local government of the Emilia-Romagna region is taking action on three levels to initiate solidarity while raising awareness of the importance of using water carefully.

First, on World Water Day 2002, they launched an initiative to encourage people to save water. The €160 000 saved was then given to the region's decentralised cooperation department to fund the water-related aspects of their international development projects.

Second, they ran a pilot-study in Bologna to test the effectiveness of water-saving devices by distributing them to all residents. The resulting savings (around €30 000) were again given to the decentralised cooperation department.

Third, and finally, the region's local government is assessing how it can best make use of changes in Italian legislation which came into effect in 2005 and which allow local authorities to modify the way water charges are calculated. The local authorities wish to take advantage of this to encourage water companies to encourage their customers to save water.

For more information see www.ermesambiente.it and www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/cooperazionedecentrata/index.htm.

Regione Emilia-Romagna Italy,
Decentralised Cooperation Department



Through its decentralised cooperation actions, the Emilia Romagna region in Italy has helped Eritrea's Gash Barka region to build and rehabilitate water points for domestic and agricultural use. Villagers now have access to a reliable source of safe water.

WaterAid: a charity promoting solidarity

WaterAid is a UK charity which works to provide people in developing countries with access to water and sanitation. Part of its work involves raising awareness among water users in the North, by collaborating with water companies who send water users information with their water bill.

In poor countries in the South, the charity helps different actors at the district level work together. In this way it brings together local government (the planners, service providers and regulators) and NGOs and private-sector service providers. It also ensures that local communities are involved and play their part in both operation and maintenance and in the monitoring of services and the provision of feedback to service providers. Often the role the charity plays centres around facilitating interaction at the district level and challenging national governments and donors to be more responsive. Their lobbying work also has a significant impact on the international development policies of the UK Government, by drawing attention to the need for more funding for water and sanitation.

For more information see www.wateraid.org.

Eau Vive: an NGO catalysing solidarity

Eau Vive is an international development NGO which works in the West African countries of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Togo. Its approach to development projects recognises that no one person or organisation alone can provide access to basic services such as water and sanitation. So, for over 27 years the organisation has been promoting and developing different types of financial and project-intervention mechanisms based around the solidarity principle.

Eau Vive initiates and facilitates partnerships between donors and the actors who undertake the projects. It does this by pooling funds from the multilateral sector (European Union, etc.), the bilateral sector (e.g. the French, British, and Canadian overseas development agencies), and the private sector in Europe, Africa, and North America (companies, foundations, etc.).

Since local funding is crucial to ensuring the relevance and sustainability of water and sanitation services, the international funds raised are used to complement local funds which local actors (local authorities, civil society organisations or community-based organisations) collect to undertake projects. As a result, over time, some projects end up being entirely funded by the local actors. Eau Vive also arranges visits between donors and local actors and organises technical exchange visits, which allows people to meet and learn from one another and builds a feeling of solidarity that goes beyond that associated simply with the giving of financial aid.

For more information see www.eau-vive.org.

Solidarity supported by water sector players

Action instigated by civil society can often be supported by actors in the water sector itself who can share their experience and expertise, as well as make financial contributions.

Solidarity shown by water sector players

Aquassistance was created in 1994 by employees of the company Lyonnaise des Eaux. They volunteer their skills in water and the environment to people who don't have access to water. Members of the association give up their time—using paid holiday leave—to go and carry out projects, which the company subsidises, in developing countries.

As a result, between 1997 and 2002 Aquassistance provided technical assistance to the water management service (Vodokanal) of Tchervonograd, a city in the Ukraine. By providing the equipment, expertise and the support needed to put in place communication and monitoring structures, the project has ensured that water-treatment installations were replaced and that users were provided with a 24-hour supply of water.

For more information see <http://aquassistance.blogspot.com>.

Another example of different water sector stakeholders working together to show their solidarity is provided by the Dutch NGO Aqua for All Foundation, an initiative created in 2002 by various water sector professionals.

Dedicated to providing sustainable water supplies and sanitation to the poor in rural and peri-urban areas, the Foundation mainly works through partnerships that bring together different areas of competence. The Foundation does not implement projects itself. Instead, it works closely with other NGOs and Dutch water companies wishing to donate money, time and expertise. It also works with the public sector, banks, the private sector, and research centres, etc. It finds that donor companies are very keen to contribute their expertise, as this is an effective way of motivating their staff, by making them feel good about themselves, their skills and their company.

For more information see www.aquaforall.nl/index.asp?v1=uk/welcome.html.

Solidarity instigated by civil society

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Solidarity supported by water sector players

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These local-level actions don't only provide much-needed funding. They also provide for the other key aspects of solidarity: experience sharing and capacity building. In this way they reinforce the legitimacy of local authorities and their capacity to manage water and sanitation services and meet the demands of the users.

Conclusions and lessons learned

- Inequalities exist with regard to people's access to safe water and basic sanitation. This is not only true in countries outside Europe. Within Europe, countries with excellent water coverage are found right next to countries in which millions of people are denied this basic right.
 - Addressing inequalities in access to water and sanitation requires us to show solidarity with our fellow human beings, whether it be those within our country or abroad.
 - Many solidarity mechanisms already exist within Europe at the multilateral, national and local levels. These successful examples of solidarity between water users and public authorities can be replicated and developed further to help reduce inequalities.
 - Work undertaken to ensure that water and sanitation are available for all must recognise
 - the legitimacy of local authorities (e.g. municipalities, villages, local authority groups, and regions),
 - their capacity to manage their water and sanitation services,
 - their ability to collaborate with different stakeholders (e.g. government, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector), both within Europe and in developing countries outside the region.
- Solidarity actions can
 - be instigated by national and local authorities through the provision of a regulatory framework and tariff systems that ensure the fair distribution of services and costs,
 - provide a safety-net for those caught in a downward spiral of debt,
 - provide, directly at the local level, the funding required to implement water and sanitation projects
 - promote local skills and knowledge and build local capacities through the sharing of experience and know-how.
 - It must be clearly understood that no one solidarity mechanism provides a stand-alone solution. Only through the use of a combination of all the solidarity mechanism discussed here can we hope to achieve sustainable access to water and sanitation for all.
 - The prime responsibility for putting water and sanitation systems in place lies with national and local government. The role of international solidarity actions is to support and add to these initiatives, both in terms of funding and capacity building.

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United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN ECOSOC) (2002), General Comment No. 15, The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

For more information on solidarity in water and sanitation please visit the sites given for the individual examples or contact:

Programme Solidarité Eau (pS-Eau): www.pseau.org

Solidarité Eau Europe (SEE): www.s-e-e.org

Académie de l'Eau: www.academie-eau.org/sommaire.php3

Author and contributors

Author

Sarah Mackenzie, Programme Solidarité Eau (pS-Eau); email: mackenzie@pseau.org

Contributors

Olivier Bommelaer, Agence Eaux Seine Normandie; email: bommelaer.olivier@aesn.fr

Peter Borkey, OECD; email:

peter.borkey@oecd.org

Pierre-Marie Grondin, pS-Eau; email:

grondin@pseau.org

Raymond Jost, SEE; email:

see@s-e-e.org

Christophe Le Jallé, pS-Eau; email:

le-jalle@pseau.org

Gérard Payen, ASTEE; email:

gerard.payen@m4x.org

Maggie White, Eau Vive; email:

maggie.white@eau-vive.org