

Delivering water and sanitation services in Niger: challenges and results



Submitted by Taibou Adamou Maiga On Thu, 09/08/2016



Niger is one of the world's poorest countries (44.5% of poverty incidence in 2014). The country faces a number of challenges in meeting the national (PROSEHA, the National Program for sustainable development) and global targets to increase access to sanitation and potable water, particularly in rural areas where the access to water is 44.2% and 7% for sanitation (2015 Ministry of Water and Sanitation data).

Overcoming these challenges while satisfying increasing demands for better or expanded service, the government began investigating options that bring in the know-how of the private sector. This has led to a growing domestic private sector provision of services in Niger.

Over the past five years, the World Bank supported efforts to work with sector stakeholders to foster the participation of domestic private entities in the management of rural water supply systems (RWSSs). This support was done through the development of a regulatory and legal framework and capacity building activities. The coordination among stakeholders has been facilitated through the convening of regular bi-monthly sector dialogues and an annual sector review meeting.

I recently conducted [a case study](#) ^[1] on domestic private sector participation in the delivery of water and sanitation services in Niger. In 1998, the government of Niger began involving the private sector in service delivery in water and sanitation, when it carried out a vast reform agenda in public service delivery, alongside the telecom, transport, and energy sectors. In 2001, urban water supply reforms resulted in the creation of two key entities: a public asset-holding company, Société de Patrimoine des Eaux du Niger (SPEN), which is responsible for investment and debt service repayment of urban water infrastructure; and a private company, Société d'Exploitation des Eaux du Niger (SEEN), responsible for the operation of infrastructure and the marketing of water services. This reform has led to an improved urban water performance - in 2001 the access was 64.6% against 91.2% in 2015; the network efficiency was 78% in 2001 against 84% in 2015; and the water bill recovery rate increased from 78% 2001 to 90% in 2015.

Even though private sector participation in water supply has been a long-standing policy in the country, **several challenges persist**, including:

- Difficulty in mobilizing the private sector in rural and small towns due to the lack of a business case and unclear rules of engagement.
- Weak capacity of the different parties involved in rural water supply (e.g. regulators, public sector, and private operators managing water supply systems).
- The water supply and sanitation (WSS) regulation body is not yet fully operational.
- Lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities of actors involved in the management of rural water supply systems (RWSSs).
- Sluggish development of the sanitation subsector in both urban and rural areas hampering private sector interest.

Building on the experience of urban water reforms, the government decided in 2009 to **take a few steps to respond to the challenges in rural water supply systems**, including:

- Development of the Public Rural Water Supply Services Guidance document supported by the Agence française de développement (AFD).
- Training of different stakeholders on implementing the Public Rural Water Supply Services Guidance with the support of the sector's development partners.
- Technical and legal assessment of public-private partnership options for the transfer of 19 small town systems to the public asset-holding company (SPEN) supported by the World Bank Group (WBG).
- Development of a Fecal Sludge Management (FSM) Services Strategy for the City of Niamey, supported by the WBG.
- Pilot project to apply information communication technology (ICTs) in the management of rural water supply services supported by the AFD and the WBG.



Official opening ceremony of water supply system in rural Niger.

As a result of these efforts,

- The regulatory and legal framework for rural water supply systems (RWSSs) has been clarified.
- Targeted municipalities and water users' associations are better informed about their roles and responsibilities under the RWSS contract arrangement.
- The capacity of municipalities to handle the supervision of RWSS contract is increasing.
- The increased awareness of municipalities about water and sanitation issues allows better dialogue between municipalities and the Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MHA).
- The capacity of private operators has increased. Before the reforms, on average, private operators managed four RWSSs; by December 2014, the number had risen to ten.
- The City of Niamey (municipality) committed to financially support, for the first three years, a private operator to be appointed to manage the sludge treatment plant and restore financial stability.



Private operators managing rural water supply showing certificate of training provided by the government.

Although Niger's domestic private sector is successfully participating in water and sanitation service delivery, and this participation has improved over recent times, it has yet to fully deliver on its full promise. This will require further investment by the private sector and the government. For example the private sector should improve its organizational structure by setting achievable standards (organizing the company to respond to the needs of the required performance), hiring qualified staff, and creating increased demand through the provision of high-quality service. At the same time Government needs to further clarify its policies - The profile of the private companies needs to be clarified and certified by government entity before operating the assets. Taken together these actions will raise performance in the sector and help the country achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [2].

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Links:

- [1] <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/533161467199079654/Domestic-private-sector-participation-in-water-and-sanitation-The-Niger-Case-Study>
- [2] <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
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