

WASH workshop – key points

INA, CIMC and CSPP (at ANU) held a workshop on March 5 2015 to discuss challenges to be dealt with in implementing the recently launched Water, Sanitation and Health (WaSH) Policy.

The workshop heard presentations from the Minister for National Planning and Monitoring, Hon Charles Abel, the Secretary for Provincial and Local Government, Munare Uyassi, and senior officials from DNPM, DoH and WaterPNG, explaining the new policy, the emerging structure of service delivery under the District Development Authority reforms, and the role of different departments and state institutions in pursuit of WaSH goals.

Addresses and comments from participants, who included representatives of local and international NGOs, private companies, development partners, and community organisations, some of whom have been long involved in provision of water supply and sanitation in PNG, can be summarized as follows:

- The new policy is a really important initiative, establishing the priority that GoPNG attaches, and needs to attach, to addressing PNG's serious WaSH challenges, and laying out objectives and targets and spelling out an institutional framework for pursuing them; however
- There will be significant hurdles to be overcome to implement the policy: the devil lies in the detail, and in WaSH the detail is complex, especially given the physical, technological, institutional, budgetary and behavioural challenges that rolling out access to and use of improved water and sanitation must confront.

Particular issues raised were:

- It is good that the policy spells out targets, but they are probably far too ambitious, especially given acknowledged limitations in capacity in the agencies, government and non-government, that will be involved in implementation. There is need for a realistic attempt to determine what might be involved in meeting the access targets, assessing them against resources likely to be available and the capacity that must be developed. In turn, this needs to be translated into more realistic targets, and a basis for allocating budgetary and donor resources to the specific agencies and activities that will be funded.
 - It will be important to build in continued consultation with stakeholders into processes of policy refinement and monitoring and evaluation.
 - In the past, funding of WASH activities has been afflicted by boom and bust cycles of funding and support, which impact heavily on the continuity of delivery capacity (including by the non-government organisations which are widely at the forefront of supporting local communities in provision of WaSH): GoPNG and development partners should be encouraged to consider

committing to longer term and sustained funding to address what is a long term issue.

- It is good to put water, sanitation and hygiene together in one policy framework, but GoPNG will have to recognize that, while they are linked in terms of the problems they address and the interactions that they entail, they are quite different animals, requiring different strategies and technologies (with water supply widely able to be delivered on a community basis, with sanitation & hygiene more on a household basis); it must also be recognized that one size doesn't fit all, and needs and situations in different locations, communities and environmental conditions require different solutions. Clearly, simple water tank solutions are the easiest to install and maintain, but are unlikely to meet water supply demand during longer periods of drought, and in areas with longer routine dry seasons (e.g. in parts of ESP, Rabaraba-Cape Vogel in MBP, and much of Central and Western Provinces), where different or supplementary solutions may be required, including with respect to water use prioritization and conservation.
- The policy will need to place a strong emphasis on sustainability: but this may well be quite complicated if implementation involves the construction of large numbers of community-level water supply and household level sanitation facilities. There will need to be a strong sense of community and household ownership, a program of activities, and considerable experimentation, targeting ways on ensuring that ensure facilities are maintained and that operational costs are met. This requires a system for maintaining a stock of workable spare parts, skills to maintain and repair, and secure support where needed, collect, retain and account for local community or other public funds.
- A big challenge will lie in the role that District Development Authorities are being tasked to play in the policy. It is clear that the DDA initiative is a work-in-progress, and stakeholders may have to think of ways of progressing the policy as the initiative is put in place.
- In a similar vein, it is clear that the existing Task Force and PMU structure will have to be retained until the proposed WaSH Authority may be established and made fully functional. Effective implementation of WaSH policies requires functionality in an area where nearly all governments are weak: inter-agency and inter-sectoral coordination. It is clear that a lot of thought is going to be required in clarifying the roles of different agencies and ensuring that they allocate resources to these roles, and that mechanisms to ensure activity coordination and effective monitoring and evaluation are put in place in the interim before the Authority comes into being (if that occurs).
- It is good to see an overarching framework being put in place to coordinate public sector activity on WaSH. However, households and communities will have to play in major role improving access to safe water and sanitation, and all players will need to find solutions to an extraordinary heterogeneity of circumstances for

which solutions will have to be found. It is therefore important that the top-down approach envisaged in the policy does not stifle effective bottom-up initiative and experimentation.

Finally, one important message from the workshop is that WaSH is but one dimension of the question of effective and sustainable use of water resources in PNG, and GoPNG should start work on a water resource management strategy, including for water catchment areas (including prioritisation for functions of the former Water Resources Bureau).