

## Lessons learned from RWSSI implementation

Under a contract with the African Development Bank/OWAS, a review of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative (RWSSI) and the RWSSI Trust Fund has been carried out by a team of experts from NIRAS Indevelop, Sweden. Based on the results of the review, a strategic plan for the period 2016 – 2025 is being prepared by the team.

The main lessons described below are drawn from all evidence assembled by the review from a number of countries and RWSSI-supported projects; based on case studies, stakeholder interviews, workshops, questionnaires, project portfolio analysis and desk study of documentation available at OWAS, including analysis of project completion reports and external evaluations.

1. **Internal and external communication and the development of analytical capacity** – An ambitious initiative such as RWSSI that depends on task managers and others to mainstreaming the concept and programme, cannot function without very strong and continuous internal communication. Improved external communications and partnerships with the main RWSS networks and agencies operating in Africa is needed for RWSSI to take up the knowledge leadership that is expected of it, complementing its political leadership. RWSSI should significantly increase its analytical capability to help guide country policies and become thought-leaders in RWSS in Africa.
2. **Use of task managers** – the approach of mainstreaming the RWSSI in task manager activities is fundamentally sound, but is challenging without being complemented by being able to draw on a multidisciplinary cadre of internationally recognised RWSS experts to guide task managers, adapt approaches to the state of the art and give on-going support to non-specialist task managers.
3. **Fragile states** – a “new” initiative such as the RWSSI will have greater success in fragile states in terms of additionality of the RWSSI - for a number of reasons.
4. **Alignment and harmonisation** – where there are already strong national programmes and donor coordination frameworks in place, the role of the initiative will need to find a niche – this could be in scaling up and replication of successful approaches or improving accountability through M&E improvements (as happened in Ethiopia and Zambia).
5. **Internal approval procedures** – a detailed and consistently applied peer review of RWSSI projects using RWSSI TF is needed, combined with training/exposure for task managers on what type of additionality is being sought. The review process should focus specifically on improving efficiency and turn-around times in project approvals, procurement, disbursements and other key project management procedures.
6. **Strategic and disaggregated use of grant finance** - The bundling of grants with loans is a core idea of RWSSI and RWSSI TF but this can lead to serious delays in start-up of implementation. A clearer and more strategic use of grants would improve the prospects of fund-raising, including at the national level.

7. **Achieving scale:** Except for some notable exceptions (e.g. Ethiopia), RWSSI remains a largely project-bound, infrastructure initiative highly dependent upon aid finance. Since public finance is insufficient to reach sustainable universal access, a new financing strategy is needed, built on the premise of scale, to maximize country capital contributions, increase revenue streams and mobilize domestic private capital. This radical shift, emerging from the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) of the third Finance for Development conference, is reinforced by the conclusions of the RWSSI review.
8. **Building capacity in decentralised management and encouraging local level partnerships, including with the private sector** – RWSS requires strong local level service management. A key focus in RWSSI project design should be on building capacity at the local level (especially local government, but also in some countries community management). RWSSI might consider partnering with an initiative such as “Agenda for Change”, a coalition of INGOs working in support of building local level management capacity. The local small-scale private sector plays an increasing role in service management and supply chain development. RWSSI should analyse and promote lessons from local private sector engagement in the sector and help devise financing mechanisms to expand this capacity in more countries.
9. **Increase tariff income:** After decades of receiving free water from protected springs, gravity systems and boreholes, poor rural people are reluctant to pay for their water supply; this often results in improper usage and an inability to achieve adequate maintenance of these water supplies with the consequence that operation and maintenance and long-term sustainability is compromised.
10. **Seek alternative technical solutions:** Conventionally engineered designs for water supply that rely on imported pumps and spare parts, and high mechanical skill levels in remote rural settings have proven to be expensive and not sustainable in general. RWSSI should tap into the alternative market for RWSS systems that draw on recent innovations by the private sector, NGOs and community/households.
11. **Making Hygiene Behavioural Change (HBC) a habit** - The lessons of failure of existing approaches, and current understanding of the drivers of making improved hygiene a habit need to be incorporated into future approaches. Useful experience of successful HBC and sanitation programmes from the past needs to be revisited and compared with more recent efforts. The concern is how best to achieve a more holistic and fully integrated RWSS approach that better aligns with the SDGs and draws on current scientific understanding on what creates for good hygienic habits. The adoption of these new approaches will not only improve the direct impacts on health, but also strengthen impacts on improved nutrition and early childhood development.
12. **Balancing the emphasis on sanitation and water** - RWSSI projects continue to be biased towards RWS and neglect sanitation. RWSSI needs to develop specific sanitation expertise which can advise on project design, support country policy development and tackle key questions such as sustaining CLTS, bridging the gap between basic household solutions and households adopting solutions on the first-rung-of-the-improved-sanitation-ladder.

13. **Mobilization and improved coordination of health and water departments for integrated RWSS approaches** - Although RWSS is a cross-cutting sub-sector, it is commonly in the RWSSI context the responsibility of a technical department that does not have the capacity to engage other ministries that would improve the opportunities to address effectively issues such as Hygiene and Behavioural Change and improved sanitation services; long-term sustainability of rural water supplies; health and poverty reduction; women's empowerment; gender equality and climate resilience, which would be achievable if RWSS were implemented in a more holistic and integrated way. MoH with the all-important preventative health or environmental health directorates and an extensive cadre of district and sub-district extension staff tends to have been largely excluded from many RWSSI-supported programmes.
14. **Improved monitoring systems** – Project completion reports and external evaluations continue to report weak RWSS monitoring systems. In some countries (for example Senegal) there has been widespread adoption of rural water mapping and ICT solutions that can keep databases up to date. RWSSI could improve the leadership of the move to have all RWSS mapped and updated in national databases improving evidence-based decision-making in the sub-sector.
15. **Regional Coordination Committee (RCC)** – The experience of anchoring the RCC with AMCOW is that there needs to be appropriate ownership both institutionally and technically for it to function. It should be anchored with AMCOW for political and other reasons, but there also needs to be a strong representation in the committee representing rural water and sanitation knowledge and experience.