

## Key Policy Challenges for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS)

Authors: John Soussan & Jens Rydder

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### Introduction

A recently completed joint GoV-donor review of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) provides a consensus position on the present status and key development priorities for the development of the sector. Meeting the needs of rural people for good water supplies and improved sanitation is a key development priority for the country. The Review highlighted the progress made and areas where challenges remain in the five years since the National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy (NRWSSS) started in the year 2000.

The final findings of the Review include a number of specific recommendations on changes to the policy and regulatory environment covering the sector. These policy recommendations are consolidated in this brief, with a number requiring urgent action if the challenges facing the sector are to be met.

### The Issues

The overall national picture for **water supply** shows good progress, with the proportion of the rural population having access to good quality water increasing by 20% in the five years since the NRWSSS was introduced. Around two out of every three rural families now have water supplies that meet their needs and that are up to international standards. If the present trends continue the government's targets of 85% of rural people having access to good water by 2010 and 100% by 2020 will be met.

Differences exist in the quality of water services between different parts of the country and different sections of the population. Present levels of coverage in highland areas are far below the national average and these areas need special attention. At the same time, more poor people in absolute terms live in coastal and delta areas, with many lacking adequate water supplies. Special efforts are needed to reach many people who's needs are not presently being met. Similar differences can be found by income group, with less than a quarter of the poorest 20% of the rural population having good water supply coverage: a figure that contrasts with the richest 20% of the population, where 80% of families have good water supplies.

The generally positive picture for increases in access to water supply is not true for improvements to the availability of **improved sanitation** facilities amongst the rural population. Here progress has been slow in all parts of the country and amongst all sections of the community (though the poor are still much worse off than middle income and high income families). Nationally, less than one third of the rural population have access to improved sanitation and the rate of improvement has lagged far behind that needed to meet national targets for the future.

The Review emphasised the serious challenges facing Viet Nam for sustainable sanitation. This has a serious impact on the health of rural people, and especially affects children, the elderly and the poor who are most vulnerable to water-borne diseases such as dysentery, diarrhoea and typhus. It also has a serious impact on the environment, and in some cases threatens vulnerable ecosystems such as wetlands and lagoons.

The importance of encouraging the involvement of the private sector (and especially small local entrepreneurs) and the greater participation of local communities in water supply and sanitation development was stressed by the review. The Review identified the need to open up greater

choices for rural communities: choices in what sorts of technologies to invest in, choices in financial mechanisms for making investments and recovering costs and choices in how they organise themselves to manage new facilities.

## Key Policy and Institutional Issues

The Review presented a series of detailed recommendations for the future development of the sector. These recommendations are intended to build on past successes and address areas where performance has been less than satisfactory.

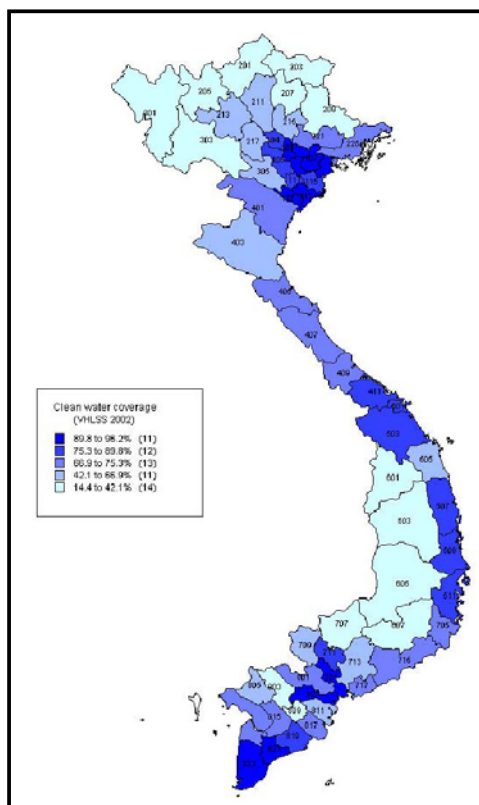
The challenges facing the sector need to be addressed on multiple levels through an integrated approach. This includes the need to establish a core national programme as follow-on from the first phase of the RWSS-NTP, need for a clearer framework of policies and regulations, better coordination between different ministries and between the centre and the provinces, a more effective strategic planning approach and the need to generate more resources for the sector. It also includes the need for more effective and coherent coordination between the efforts of the GoV and the support provided by the donor community.

On this basis, it is recommended that the following key policy and institutional issues be addressed on a priority basis:

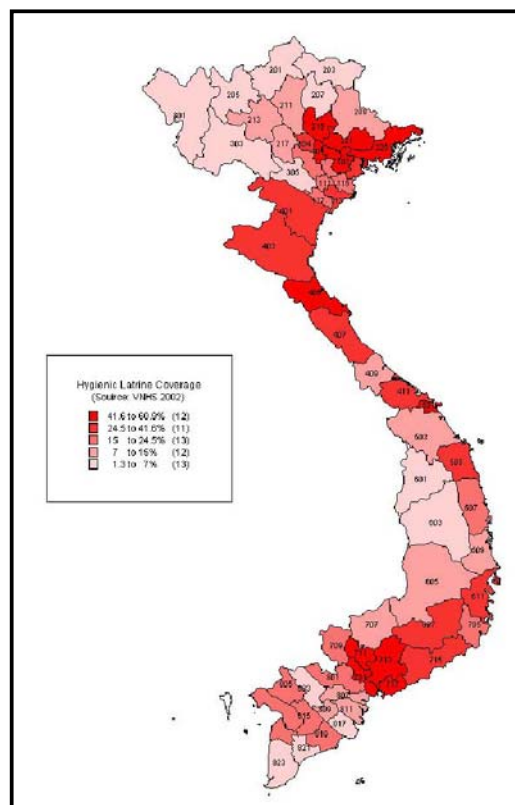
1. Development of the sector should be based around a **national programme** which includes a distinct programming framework for sanitation and major increases in the funds available for this critically important health, environmental and poverty issue.
2. Development of a coherent and integrated framework for **strategic planning** within the sector. This strategic planning process should focus on:
  - Strengthening the level of **decentralization** and make sure that provinces are more in control over details of planning, implementing and managing of RWSS facilities, but within a regulator framework set at the centre.
  - **Socialization** as a means for enhancing demand-led approaches, consumer contributions, greater participation and private sector enterprise involvement.
  - A distinctive programme for **sanitation**, with dedicated budget provisions and institutional capabilities, to address the sanitation challenge.
  - The effective **targeting** of assistance to the areas and people most in need, based on improved **strategic planning** and **monitoring and evaluation**.
  - **Direct donor support** focused on: (a) building capacities and helping the institutional reform process and (b) targeting the specific needs of different poor communities who are unable to pay for improved facilities.
  - A nation-wide approach to awareness raising through **IEC** interventions that builds on experiences in projects (esp. Danida, UNICEF, etc) and defines modalities for disseminating these nationally.
3. Establishment of a **RWSS Division within MARD**, with 2 distinct units: one for water supply and one for sanitation to enable the development of a national initiative to develop a more effective policy and regulatory framework and strategic planning system to address the sanitation challenge.
4. Establishment of a **RWSS Sector Support Partnership** comprising key GoV and donor agencies as a mechanism for improved sector coordination and harmonisation in support of nation-wide application of the National Strategy in the context of the new national programme and donor supported programmes.
5. Strengthening the **participation of local communities** RWSS decisions need to focus on the policy and legal framework and supporting its implementation at the local level. This framework includes the **socialization** of RWSS, **decentralization** and **grassroots democracy**. Firstly, regulations and guidelines are needed to support the implementation of Grassroots Democracy decrees from the commune to provincial level. Secondly, regulations and guidelines are needed to implement Decree 24 on the mobilization, management and utilization of people's contribution to rural infrastructure at district and commune levels. Thirdly, regulations and guidelines are required to make clear the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies, organizations and individuals that have the potential to participate in the socialization of RWSS. Fourthly, revision of Decision 62 on provision of credit towards

RWSS interventions is required to ensure access to financing for all rural constituencies throughout the country.

- Developing a strategy to enhance **private sector** involvement. The strategy should focus in particular on small, local entrepreneurs. Criteria for fair and effective **pricing and cost recovery** mechanisms need to be established. As such, the first step in the development of the strategy is a number of **further studies and pilot activities** to investigate different aspects of private sector development. Finally, there is a need to reform the Enterprise Law and related policies to create a level playing field for the private and public sectors and to replace the present plethora of licenses and sub-licenses issued at local levels by simplified and systematic regulatory model developed at the centre. Decree 24 on the mobilization, management and utilization of people's contribution to rural infrastructure should be amended, so that the community has the authority to manage the funds that they contributed for RWSS under the supervision of the commune PC.



Clean Water Supply Coverage



Hygienic Latrine Coverage

Clean Water Supply and Hygienic Latrines by Income Group

Region	Clean Water Supply			Hygienic Latrines		
	Poorest 20%	Middle 20%	Richest 20%	Poorest 20%	Middle 20%	Richest 20%
Red River Delta	54.7	73.1	93.2	2.5	11.9	71.1
North East	5.3	11.6	47.3	0.5	3.6	51.0
North West	5.3	11.6	47.3	0.5	3.6	51.0
N. Central Coast	12.9	30.1	65.1	2.6	7.5	57.1
S. Central Coast	16.0	21.7	63.9	4.0	19.4	83.0
Central Highlands	4.3	9.4	43.9	1.3	16.9	76.7
South East	27.7	37.8	87.6	6.5	23.1	86.7
Mekong Delta	41.1	48.8	75.3	1.0	4.9	44.8
All Viet Nam	22.7	42.7	78.8	2.0	10.7	69.6

(2003, VLSS data)