

ECO-Asia Water and Sanitation Program

Enabling Water Services Delivery to the Urban Poor

The Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005 strengthens the United States Government commitment to enabling access to safe water and sanitation for developing countries, and supports achievement of Target 10 of the UN Millennium Development Goals to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015.

In Asia, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) implements regional water and sanitation activities through the Environmental Cooperation-Asia (ECO-Asia) Water and Sanitation Program. ECO-Asia develops and implements pilot projects that demonstrate innovative strategies for expanding, improving and financing water services delivery in Asia. One program focus is to develop innovative models that address technical, institutional and financial constraints to expanding water services to the urban poor.

Challenge. An estimated 84 million people in Asian cities do not have access to safe drinking water. Many do not have access to piped water and spend considerable time collecting water, and paying vendors much higher rates than those with connections to public utilities.

Lack of access to safe water places the poor at risk to waterborne diseases, such as infectious diarrhea. More children die each year from lack of access to safe water and sanitation than from almost any other cause. Lack of piped water also directly affects economic productivity: According to the World Health Organization, each year an estimated six billion working days are lost globally due to unsafe water and sanitation.

Connecting the urban poor is a difficult challenge for water service providers in Asia. Due to weak institutional capacity, governance systems and financial arrangements, most water service providers lack the ability to connect the urban poor. Most water service providers impose low tariffs or subsidies that limit their ability to invest in new systems and services for urban poor communities. Many are not even aware that the urban poor are willing and able to pay for piped water.



Women and girls spend considerable time collecting water at public stand posts in a slum in Pune, India. (John Pasch/ECO-Asia)

ECO-Asia Response. ECO-Asia works with water service providers to pilot and replicate innovative community-based models for expanding access to water services to poor communities. In working with under-served poor communities, ECO-Asia employs an approach that enables counterparts from different Asian countries to share experiences and identify regional commonalities. ECO-Asia also disseminates and replicates findings and best practices through partnerships with regional organizations and networks.

Pilot Activities. To illustrate innovative solutions, ECO-Asia develops and implements pilot projects that actively engage communities, while supporting service providers in developing appropriate business models. ECO-Asia supports establishment of community- or local entrepreneur- run small-scale distribution systems that are supported by water utilities with bulk water supplies.

ECO-Asia works with local governments and water utilities to convert public taps into bulk connections that community based organizations or small-scale entrepreneurs then distribute to between 50 and 100 households. Through these arrangements, the poor benefit from lower connection costs, more convenient service, and flexible payment options, while the water utilities recover costs and reduce administrative burden.

Pilot Methodology. ECO-Asia employs a common approach in developing and implementing pilot projects (see box). Pilot cities include Bandung and Surabaya in Indonesia, Pune in India, and Negombo in Sri Lanka. In these pilots, ECO-Asia focuses on three main activities:

- Increasing affordability awareness through targeted social marketing campaigns;
- Assisting communities and small entrepreneurs in planning low-cost distribution systems; and
- Facilitating development of service agreements for bulk water supply to small-scale community distribution systems.

Bandung, Indonesia. In partnership with the city water utility, based on a survey of 250 communities, ECO-Asia is converting two standpipe water taps into intake points for a community-run distribution system. The utility will replicate this approach with other communities using public taps.

Surabaya, Indonesia. Based on a survey of 12,000 underserved households, the Surabaya water utility is identifying up to 5,000 respondents who are willing to pay for piped water, and will offer these households a variety of affordable water connection options using World Bank Output Based Assistance (OBA) funds.

Pune, India. The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) is working with ECO-Asia to develop new strategies for continuous water supply by reorganizing a service area into district metered areas (DMAs). As part of this effort, the PMC is converting water taps into house connections for two DMAs that will serve 10,000 slum dwellers in partnership with the Manila Water Company.

Negombo, Sri Lanka. The National Water Supply & Drainage Board (NWSDB) and the Municipality of Negombo are collaborating with ECO-Asia to test an innovative approach for providing piped water to a settlement of 80 families in a local fishing community. NWSDB provides bulk water supply to a newly created community based organization, which establishes a model for replication in similar settlements in Negombo.

Regional Cooperation. To promote sharing of lessons learned, ECO-Asia facilitates dialogue among pilot partners, including regional workshops, training and toolkits. ECO-Asia works to disseminate results through regional networks, such as the Southeast Asia Water Utilities Network (SEAWUN). ECO-Asia also pursues financing of pro-poor initiatives through cooperation with the Association of Development Financing Institutions in Asia and the Pacific (ADFIAP).

ECO-Asia Methodology for Working with Underserved Urban Communities

1. Prepare Pilot Project

Identify a pilot project area through consultation with senior policy makers and stakeholders. Survey the pilot area to establish baseline data.

2. Engage the Community

Conduct social marketing through awareness campaigns and mobilize the community through partnerships with local NGOs and community-based organizations.

3. Address Enabling Conditions

Identify appropriate entry points for addressing weaknesses in enabling conditions that reflect stakeholder needs and critical inputs for design of water service delivery and identify sources of funding.

4. Implement Pilot Project

Work with partners to complete engineering designs, procurement and other project implementation requirements. Provide ongoing support for operations and maintenance (O&M) by identifying O&M operators and conducting on-the-job and off-site training.

5. Replicate at National and Regional Levels

Document processes, outcomes, impacts and successes. Share results with partner organizations and interested stakeholders.

Environmental Cooperation-Asia

Environmental Cooperation-Asia (ECO-Asia) is a regional program of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The ECO-Asia Water and Sanitation Program is active in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

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