

## **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): New Players in Water Policy**

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Governments have always dominated water policy decision making. But in the last few decades, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a growing role. Particularly in democracies, NGOs have taken an active and vocal role in determining how water should be protected and shared.

There are many types of NGOs: local and international, representative and self-created, those active in fieldwork, advocacy or research. In Ghana, for instance, there is an NGO called ProNet. In Nepal, there is Newah. In South Africa, the Mvula Trust. In Ethiopia, Water Action.

International specialist water NGOs include Water Aid (UK); Eau Vive (France); and Simavi (Netherlands). In the US, the American Water Works Association has established an NGO called "Water for People." Information, research and networking NGOs include CINARA (Colombia); NETWAS (Kenya); IRC (Netherlands); International Secretariat for Water (Canada); and Programme Solidarite Eau (France). As you can see, there are many types of NGOs now concentrating on water issues around the globe. A more complete list of NGOs can be found on the websites of the Global Water Partnership and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council.

NGOs contribute to policy making in several ways: First, through representation, where the organization speaks for ordinary people. NGOs along with community based organizations can pass on the views of the people, building even more legitimacy if they are in some way elected or representative of the people. In some circumstances (such as one-party states), NGOs almost take the place of political parties in voicing the people's feelings.

Second, through innovation, where NGOs lead the government in trying out new ideas and approaches, and in translating these into policies. Third, monitoring, where NGOs, because of their independence, can monitor the application of water policies. This is an acknowledged role of NGOs in such issues as human rights, and it is growing in water policy as well, in such activities as monitoring, for example, the abilities of private sector contracts. Fourth, research. Especially in industrialized nations, there are many NGOs that specialize in researching and publishing information. Information is power, and so the free availability of objective information can help all parties develop policies more equitably.

What kind of activities have NGOs participated in? In Ghana, for instance, a group of local NGOs, supported by WaterAid, decided they needed to establish a dialog with the government to create a national water policy. And so, 10 years ago, they hosted a conference at Mole National Park to which they invited the government and other interested parties. The Mole Conference has now become an important annual event. The Ghanaian government has acknowledged the role that NGOs play in making, following and monitoring the national water and sanitation policies.

In India, NGOs have lobbied the state government to change policies on sanitation from one based on subsidies to a marketing-led, demand-driven approach. Meanwhile, in Britain, NGOs concerned with water and sanitation in developing countries have recently formed the UK NGOs Water Forum. The Forum discusses policy questions with the British Government's Department for International Development.

There is no doubt that NGOs carry clout. For example, at the recent Second World Water Forum in The Hague, several NGOs assembled to present and debate their policy views, which were then delivered to the ministers from more than 100 countries that had gathered there.

WaterAid is a good example of an NGO in action. WaterAid was founded in 1981 by the people and organizations of the British water industry and now works in 16 countries in Africa and Asia. Its aim is to help poor people in developing countries improve their lives through improved drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. It achieves this by working through partner organizations to support community-managed projects; by building up the capacity of its partners (government and local NGOs) to take over the work without dependency on WaterAid; and to influence other organizations to lend their support to the problems at hand.

WaterAid's members can be likened to a company's shareholders. Current membership includes all of the

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privatized water PLCs and most of the other water undertakings in England and Wales; all of the Scottish and Northern Ireland water authorities; the major trades unions associated with the industry; the Water Research Centre; the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, and the Institution of Water Officers.

Projects are identified by WaterAid country representatives based overseas. The technical feasibility of the water project is only one consideration; so is the motivation and commitment of the people. WaterAid provides the financial support and technical advice, but it is the local people who undertake the hard work of collecting sand, digging trenches and mixing concrete, and it is they who maintain and manage them in the future.

Sometimes, groups within and outside Britain raise money for specific projects. For instance, the cost of a village hand-dug well usually starts at about \$1500 and includes an associated program of health education and sanitation which will benefit a few hundred people. Gravity-fed water networks, benefiting thousands of people are more expensive, but they generally cost no more than \$15 a person. In some cases, national organizations such as the Rotary or Lions will fund a major program on a national basis. Where this happens, each club that raises the funds is linked to the overall program by WaterAid.

In Ethiopia, for instance, WaterAid is supporting several spring-fed gravity driven projects in the South of this very dry nation, while in the North, several hand-dug wells are underway. In Zambia, which has been stricken by drought and diminishing rainfall over the last 30 years, WaterAid is partnering with several national government organizations in a program of hand-dug wells and latrines. It is also starting a research program to improve the present poor rate of success for hand-dug and tubewell projects.

As the former Chief Executive of WaterAid, I'm pleased to say that with an annual budget of \$16 million, we help more than 600,000 people a year. Hopefully, that number will expand to millions of people in the coming years.