

TECHNICAL INFORMATION NOTE

Capacity Building Workshop on Partnerships for Improving the Performance of Water Utilities in the Latin America and Caribbean Region Recife, Brazil 11-13 June 2007

1. Background

The UN Millennium Summit (6-8 September 2000) adopted the Millennium Declaration, which contains, *inter-alia*, a number of international development goals, including one on water: to halve by 2015 the proportion of people who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water. The Governments reaffirmed their commitment to this goal in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (26 August - 4 September 2002), and further committed to halve by 2015 the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in its 12th and 13th sessions (2004 and 2005) evaluated the progress made in achieving the water, sanitation and human settlement goals/targets and agreed on a number of policy options to accelerate the implementation. The Commission recognized that there is no one-size-fits-all solution; therefore, countries may want to craft their own strategies, learning from experience but also charting new directions with innovative approaches.

Many of the water-related meetings and conferences have emphasized the need for capacity building of public water utilities to meet the MDGs on water and sanitation. In this particular area, UN-DESA has been supporting the countries, *inter-alia*, by organizing targeted training workshops. So far, two workshops had already been organized—one for the Asia and Pacific Region in Bangkok (25-27 July 2006), and the other for the Africa Region in Nairobi (6-8 December 2006). This is the third workshop that will be devoted to the capacity building of senior water utility managers of the Latin America and Caribbean Region, and will held in Recife, Brazil (11-13 June 2007).

2. Objectives

The main objective of this workshop is to contribute towards the implementation of the global water and sanitation agenda by strengthening the capacities of water utilities of the Latin America and Caribbean Region in meeting the dual challenge of service expansion and efficient delivery of services. The workshop will be an opportunity for the senior water utility managers of the region to engage in a dialogue with their counterparts from other countries and experts representing various international development organizations to address these challenges. More specific objectives include:

- Sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good practices concerning the management and governance of water utilities;
- Creating an awareness about the nature and scope of institutional reforms needed to improve the efficiency of public water utilities;
- Promoting partnerships among water operators; and
- Recommending actions to strengthen the role of water operators in the delivery of water and sanitation services.

3. Technical Scope

Rationale behind selecting this theme is that water utilities in developing countries are facing many problems, including lack of technical, management and financial capacities to overcome the challenge of providing sustainable water and sanitation services. Capacity building has many dimensions—ranging from human resources development to policy and institutional reforms to improved financial governance. The UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation views partnerships among water operators as an important instrument to bridge the capacity gaps of public water utilities. As such, this workshop will focus on the following four themes.

- Managing water and sanitation services in urban areas
- Strengthening institutional governance and accountability
- Financing water and sanitation services
- Promoting partnerships among water operators

Available evidence suggests that many of the public utilities have taken up these challenges commendably and have laid down solid grounds for continuing expansion of both infrastructure and services. On the other hand, performance of many utilities is on the decline both for reasons of poor governance structure and because capacity building reforms have not received the sustained attention they deserve.

4. Work Organization

The workshop proceedings will be organized under four specific thematic sessions (as mentioned in the preceding section) over a three days period (11-13 June 2007). Each specific session will include a number of keynote presentations from eminent experts, case studies to be presented by country representatives, and a panel discussion involving all speakers of that particular session and selected country representatives. In addition, working groups will be formed to address some specific issues. The session on Water Operators Partnership will be devoted to promote the idea at national, regional and global levels, as well as to promote and strengthen networking among these levels.

5. Partners

UN-DESA/DSD will be organizing this workshop in partnership with The Ministry of Cities of the Government of Brazil and Companhia Pernambucana de Saniamento (COMPESA). Other collaborating partners may include UN-ECLAC, UN-HABITAT Inter-American Development Bank, Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank, The Pan-American Health Organization, and The Organization of American states and AIDIS.

6. Expected Outcomes

The proposed workshop is an important step forward in helping the managers of public water utilities acquire expertise in: implementing institutional and policy reforms; strengthening institutional governance and accountability; formulating capacity building plans for the public utilities; and developing and administering partnerships among water operators. Such expertise will enable the public utilities to become more efficient, responsive to their clients, commercially astute and financially solvent. Moreover, this meeting will serve as a vehicle for raising awareness about the progress being made and the way forward. Results of this workshop will lead to improved south-south cooperation, especially among water utilities.