

Building the Urban Water Supply Sector in Afghanistan- A Case Study for Nations Emerging from Conflict

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Abstract

A large number of the water projects currently underway in the world have unfortunately come about as the direct result of wars and internal conflicts. Working in conflict ridden and post conflict environments poses its own set of challenges for the water manager. The author of this paper will highlight some of these issues that have arisen in his own country Afghanistan, as it struggles to recover from conflict. It is hoped that the subject of water provision in countries emerging from conflict becomes a focal point for global water discourse.

Keywords

Afghanistan, Urban Water Sector, Institutional Reform

BACKGROUND AND RECENT HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN

The nation of Afghanistan has suffered under various forms of conflict for the past 35 years. After 40 years under King Mohammad Zaher, power was seized in a coup by Mohammad Dawood in 1973. This was followed in 1978 by a communist regime under Noor Mohammad Taraki. A few years later in 1980 the Soviet Union invaded the country and a new President was installed, Babrak Karmal followed by Dr Najibullah from 1985. In 1992 a Mujahidin led insurgency entered the capital city Kabul and seized power from the Soviets. From 1992 up to 1997 the urban areas of Afghanistan were the scene of much violence and destruction, culminating in the take-over of Government by the Taliban. Shortly after the 9/11 attacks in the USA, a coalition of NATO attacked the Taliban forces and prevailed after a brief but intense conflict.

The Bonn conference in December 2001 installed an interim Government, which was followed by the Loya Jirga in Kabul approving a transitional government, during which time a new constitution was adopted. Democratic elections took place in 2004 confirming President Hamid Karzai and his Government.

Regrettably, up to now the Taliban insurgency has continued throughout the country. A large ISAF and Afghan National armed force is engaged in an on-going effort to curtail and defeat the insurgency.

During all these years of conflict the urban water distribution sector has managed to remain operational. Some rehabilitation projects were completed in 1985 funded by DACAAR, Care International (funded by European Commission), National Solidarity (France), and UNICEF. Under the Taliban very little new efforts occurred to reinstate the sector, only a few NGOs continued with water related activities. Also, many of the qualified staff engineers, accountants and other professionally qualified persons left the sector to go abroad or to join international organisations. Also the Taliban policies prevented women from taking an employment role in the sector. From a staff of 40 experienced engineers in the 80's, the Central Authority for Water Supply and Sewerage (CAWSS) was left with only 2 qualified persons by 2002.

KEY CHALLENGES IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATION:

Afghanistan in the post-conflict situation did not have a suitable legal and regulatory framework that could fulfil the needs of Afghanistan. What did exist was not used or respected in the water sector.

In the post-conflict situation an unclarity of role in all levels of policy, regulatory and operations existed. The responsibilities and decision making powers in the sector have been widely centralised. The service providing organisations have been widely inefficient and ineffective due to high political interferences in the daily operations in cities nearby and almost no communication with other similar organisation in far-off cities.

During the civil war the majority of qualified and experienced Afghan cadres emigrated out of the country, leaving behind few experienced and qualified personnel. In the post conflict situation even those limited number of cadres also left the CAWSS and joined other international organisations and private sector organisations due to having either very low salary or even not being paid. This was due to the fact that CAWSS did not have enough funds to pay higher salaries to their staff.

The former infrastructure both in terms of hardware and institution were heavily damaged during the civil war therefore these were not enough to fulfil the needs of the population in the Post-Taliban regime considering that the infrastructure was damaged and a significant number of people repatriated back to the country. This created a big demand for water supply, which required huge investments for rehabilitation and infrastructure development.

START OF REBUILDING

Infrastructure

The overall urban water sector in Afghanistan was controlled by a parastatal organisation called the Central Authority for Water and Sewerage (CAWSS).

This organisation, falling under the authority of Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) had been formed in 1972 and by 2002 was responsible for water supply activities in some 14 cities and towns across the country. During the 1970s some progress had been made in sectoral development i.e. the Canadian sponsored Kabul Master Plan and the construction of the Logar Water Project. However, much of the infrastructure had suffered extensive damage in the various conflicts.

The development initiatives could be categorised in various stages which are emergency or short term, medium term and long term. The first years of the post-Taliban regime were called emergency. In that time various ad-hoc development measures were initiated to rehabilitate water supply infrastructure which were installed in the past. Different NGOs and international development organisations played a very important role to reinstate the former installations. Emergency initiatives are complete now and medium term initiatives are ongoing.

After the installation of the Karzai Government in 2004, some donors and multilateral organisations embarked on programmes to rehabilitate and repair the existing facilities. Projects were undertaken by among others ICRC, DACAAR and CARE, while international donors such as GIZ, USAID, World Bank and KfW also became active.



Alaudin Pump Station Kabul, Before and After Emergency Rehabilitation Efforts

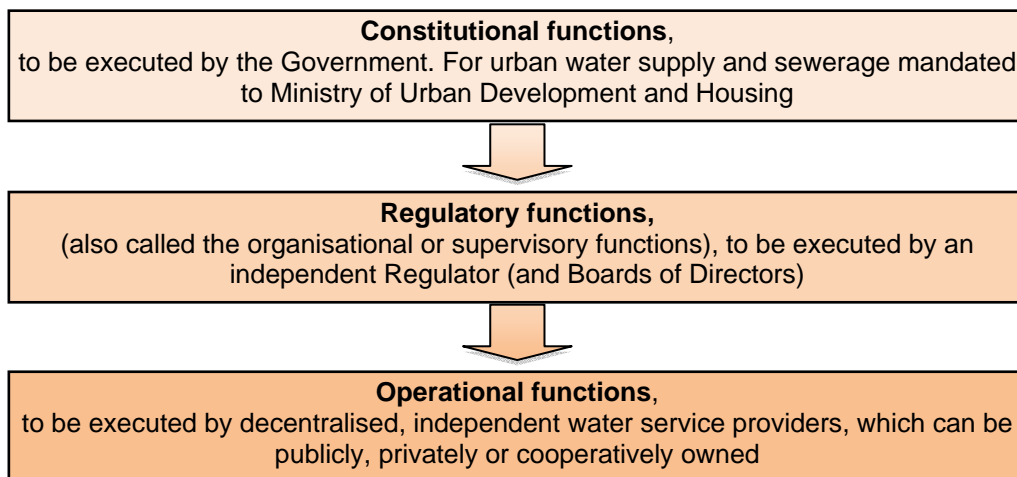
Projects in Progress

At the present time some 200 million US\$ worth of capital works are in progress in the various cities of Afghanistan. These projects are primarily for water supply, and generally include the construction of well fields, transmission, and storage and distribution networks. The main funders of these works are the German BMZ through KfW, as well as the World Bank. In due course, groundwater capacity and quality constraints will require the treatment of surface water for use in the cities. Other donors such as USAID, Italian Cooperation, Provincial Rehabilitation Teams and ICRC etc are financing projects in various provincial towns in the country.

Institutional Reform and Organisational Development

Considering all the challenges it was realised that role clarity is required. During that time no such legal documents existed, which could have provided basis for role clarification and separation of various constitutional/policy functions from those of regulatory and operational. Therefore it was decided jointly by all stakeholders to form a policy document (Afghanistan Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Policy, dated September 2005) which could allow the sector to be reformed so that each functional level could specifically focus on a certain level to improve efficiency. The output of the policy document developed by the Afghan Urban Water Sector, in co-operation with German assistance and others contained:

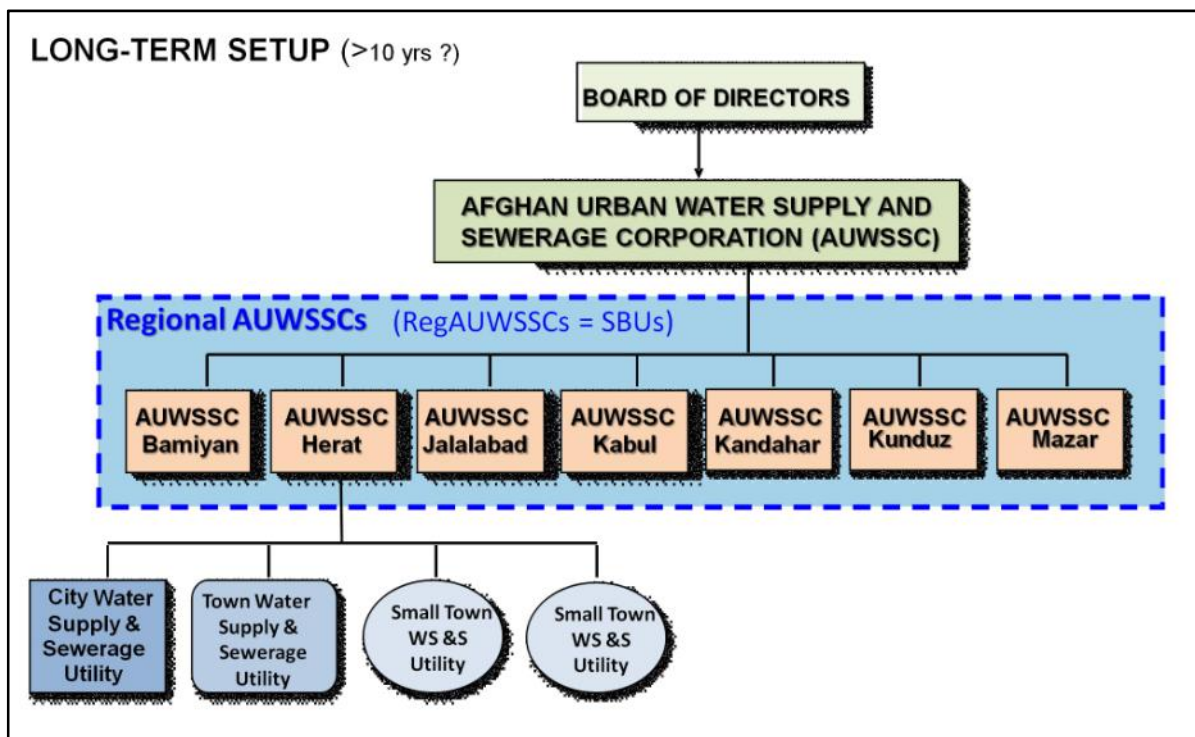
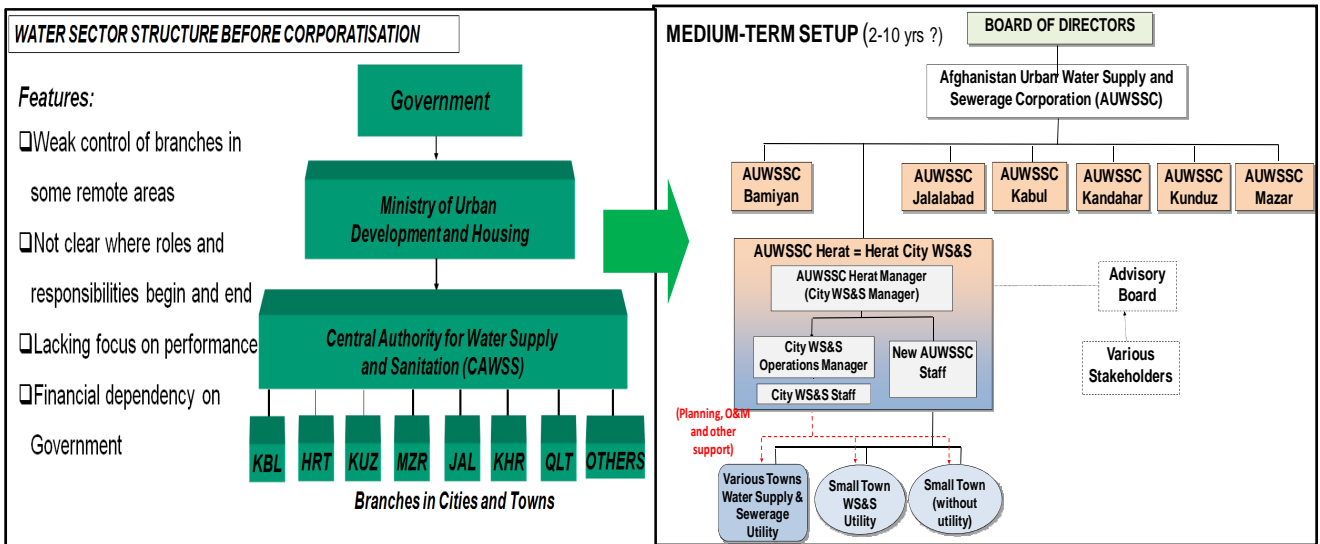
- The drafting and passing of the new Water Act (Afghanistan Water Law Gazette No. 974 - 28 February 2009)
- The formation of the new umbrella organisation AUWSSC , a corporation aimed at running the urban water utilities according to commercial principles
- Drafting various policy documents to support the management of water in Afghanistan



In addition to the policy document an Institutional Development Plan (Institutional Development Plan, dated September 2005) was also developed which outlined how the Afghan Water Sector could be developed and gradually transformed in the short-term, medium-term and long-term.

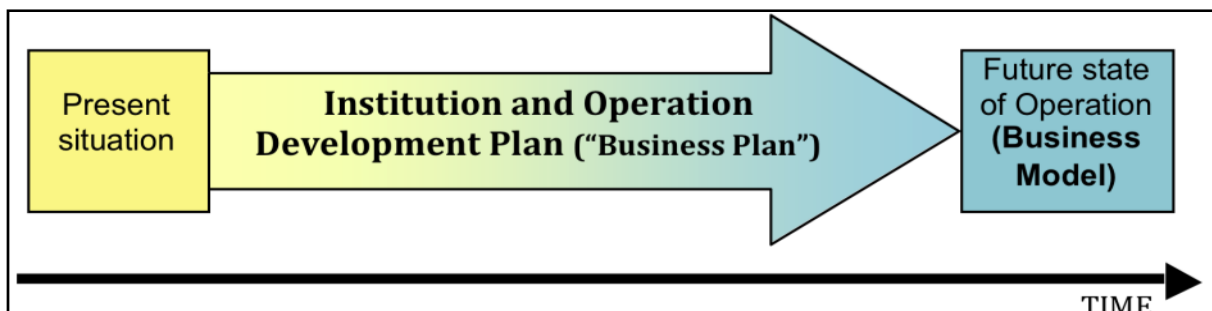
In the Institutional Development Plan it was declared that the state-owned enterprise called CAWSS will be corporatized into Afghan Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation (AUWSSC) so that it has freedom to manage its operations with full autonomy and achieve full cost recovery for its sustainability. This was not possible to achieve under the state owned enterprise because it did not have the full freedom to appoint suitable staff and manage its operations efficiently, in addition from time to time personnel changes were also conducted by the state authorities. In the medium term the country will be divided in seven regional water supply entities under the direct control of the management of AUWSSC.

In this model AUWSSC (Urban Water Supply Improvement Programme (WSIP), ADVISORY SERVICES to Afghan Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation (AUWSSC) by Tore Laugerud, dated May 2010) comprises a General Forum of Shareholders which is composed of the relevant ministries of Finance, Urban Development, Economy, Kabul Municipality and National Environmental Agency. They have respectively 40%, 35%, 10%, 10% and 5% of shares and appoint their representative board members as per their shares. In the long run it is planned that the corporation be further developed by decentralising the operational work and giving regional water supply utilities further autonomy on its operations. These regional water supply utilities will also have the responsibility to manage and oversee the operations in surrounding smaller water supply facilities in various cities and towns.



Work in the field of institutional reform was largely carried out with support from the German Government through organisations such as GIZ, DED and CIM; the World Bank also took very active part in the institutional reform and development process. Since 2008 USAID has also started to contribute in this field. The work concentrates on technical and financial training of local staff, implementation of systems to control operations and customer management.

In order to achieve the long term objective the Institutional Development Plan was reviewed and an Institutional and Operation Development Plan is currently being prepared.



SOME LESSONS LEARNED

Reconstruction of a devastated urban water sector requires interventions at a number of levels:

1. Firstly, existing infrastructure requires to be rehabilitated. This involves repair of both the visible damage, as well as the invisible. For example, underground networks have been severely damaged by the impacts of explosive devices and water losses due to leakage can be much higher than usual. Repair information is used to recover lost knowledge in relation to the network (diagrams can be updated) and location of connections (customer database).
2. Population migration that has occurred during and immediately post conflict places a severe strain on existing infrastructure. New projects to extend production and distribution are required and existing facilities such as well fields are threatened by human settlements taking place in catchment protection areas.
3. Infrastructure master planning and the coordination of projects require a strong focal point to manage implementation. This should be established by the new government as soon as possible so that the offers from the international community can be productively coordinated. All investment measures should be accompanied by parallel capacity building to support sustainability.
4. The post-conflict environment usually includes many legislative and constitutional changes and there is therefore an opportunity to carry out fundamental reform to the underlying water sector policies and institutions in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the sector. In Afghanistan the water institution CAWSS has been transformed into a state –owned corporation AUWSSC, which can now operate at arm's length from government.
5. The lost human resource asset is very difficult to replace. Again, a national HR strategy for the sector is required as part of its master plan. In many post conflict situations young people are available as they are not yet employed in other commercial and technical sectors. They should be engaged and placed on fast track training so that they can then be employed in the expanding water sector. From the perspective of the donors and international community, it is a temptation to hire outside contractors to take over and manage the local water sector. However, this approach risks condemning the local institutions to a long lasting position of weakness. Rather, there should be a strong focus on the development of local capacity that can quickly take over the management of the sector.