



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

Policy reforms in the rural drinking water supply and sanitation sector in Tajikistan:

Progress, gaps and ways forward

May 2022

*This document provides a summary of the full policy report: *Policy reforms in the rural drinking water supply and sanitation sector in Tajikistan*, authored by Shukhrat Igamberdiyev, May 2022



The Tajikistan Water Supply and Sanitation (TajWSS) project is a Swiss government initiative, funded through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and implemented by Oxfam in Tajikistan in partnership with UNDP.

Access to safe drinking water supply services in rural Tajikistan has barely improved over the past 20 years. The overall data indicate up and down trends for access to water supply between 2001 and 2020. Today, access to safely managed drinking water varies between 31%¹ and 43.4%² of people living in rural settlements, while the latest estimate for national-level access is 55.2%.³ By contrast, access to (rural) basic sanitation has steadily improved from 88.8% to 97.8%⁴ between 2000 and 2020, and open defecation has all but vanished (from 1.3% to 0.0% national, 1.4% to 0.0% rural, and 0.8% to 0.0% urban).⁵ Thorough analysis, though, indicates that those indicators fail to capture the quality side of sanitation and hygiene: that is, poor conditions of sanitation facilities, including ageing sewers and obsolete wastewater treatment plants; poorly designed, operated and maintained septic tanks; and unhygienic latrines.

Despite considerable financial support and investments from financing institutions and donor development partners, the overall situation does not seem to suggest improvements at expected rates. The status report from the implementation of the programme⁶ for improvement of access to safe drinking water for the population of the Republic of Tajikistan (RT) for the period 2007–2020 indicates that the amount of financing achieved for rural drinking water supply is highly disproportionate. Compared with reported financing at the rate of 84% for urban drinking water supply, the rural sector received only about 16%. This is despite the vast majority of people living in rural areas.

The challenges community-based models commonly face are reported to be: 1) largely insufficient technical and institutional capacity for operation and maintenance (O&M), 2) poor organisational management and 3) poor financing literacy (full-cost recovery tariffs, access to finances, water fee collection). While capacities for organisational management and financing literacy (such as tariff setting, cost-items calculations and mediation) are reasonably feasible to implement, it is the **O&M capacity** that is the **most challenging**. Access to professional engineers is highly limited at district level and almost unavailable in rural settlements.

In that respect, implementers of rural drinking water supply and sanitation (DWS&S) projects have identified key systemic challenges that need to be addressed as part of the DWS&S sector reform agenda. These constitute a set of inter-linked **root causes** that prevent development of an **enabling environment** for sustained upward improvement.

¹ Latest figure published by the World Bank (2017). *Glass Half Full: Poverty Diagnostic of Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene Conditions in Tajikistan*. WASH Poverty Diagnostic. World Bank, Washington, DC. Retrieved 11 April, 2022 from: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/27830>

² Latest figure published by the Government of the RT. Source: Water Sector Reform Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2016–2025.

³ Latest figure published by WHO and UNICEF (2021). *Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene*. Retrieved 9 April, 2022 from: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Programme for improvement of access to safe drinking water for the population of the RT for the period 2007–2020, approved by the Government of Tajikistan, as of 2 December 2006, #514. Later extended until 2021 (Resolution #717, as of 31 December 2020).

▷ Policy framework improvements and the reform agenda remain incomplete

a) recently adopted laws do not provide effective implementation support mechanisms, b) duplication of roles – policy, regulation and service delivery – persists, distribution of roles is unclear (national authorities, State Unitary Enterprise *Khojagii Manziliyu Kommunalii* (SUE KMK), district authorities), and c) conflict of interest persists within SUE KMK (focal responsible entity for DWS&S sector) with all-inclusive roles along expansionary agenda not in line with state demonopolisation policy.

▷ Sector policies and strategies lack effective implementation and financing mechanisms

Adopted policies are extremely slow in implementation due to a lack of effective financing strategies and means to bring impact on the ground.

▷ Investment climate remains ineffective for rural DWS&S

a) ownership and operational management rights are not guaranteed, b) community-driven business models in DWS&S service delivery are not truly promoted (negligent investments), c) state financial support mechanisms are not duly implemented (taxation, subsidies, targeted financing) and tariffs remain significantly lower than full-cost recovery, d) demonopolisation and decentralisation policies are compromised by a lack of due support on alternative non-state service provision models, and e) norms and standards for DWS&S systems remain costly and technically inefficient.

▷ Capacities in policy, regulation and the service delivery domain remain critically low

There are growing capacity gaps at all levels of the governance system (duty-bearers and rights-holders).

Over the past 13 years, with Tajikistan Water Supply and Sanitation (TajWSS) project support, a series of important policies have been developed and approved by the government. The principal approach has been to address systemic issues on a case-by-case basis that would later feed into policy reform. In this way, the **achievements are characterised by defining the rationale for policy change** along with some support to develop and implement new policies

A thorough analysis of the reform agenda indicates that although the observed challenges and development needs of the rural water sector are rightly acknowledged, it needs a **well-elaborated strategy and mechanisms** to achieve *transformational change* both from the economic (sustainability) and institutional governance viewpoints. The lack of a comprehensive strategy on how to achieve certain targets or address concrete systemic issues has often been linked to the need for much greater investments. For that matter, the government has remained dependent on outside support. Consequently, this policy report makes the following policy recommendations:

- A **comprehensive DWS&S sector development strategy** must be developed that encompasses the systemic issues identified above, along with realistic implementation, financing and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

- The **financing strategy** must take note of internal sources of financing via elaboration of tax alleviation policy, preferential financing, pro-poor subsidy mechanisms and true implementation of full-cost recovery tariffs. **Affordability and willingness-to-pay** full-cost recovery tariffs must be assessed regularly, thereby informing policy reform. The strategy towards achieving **full-cost recovery tariffs**⁷ must be given due attention to ensure the sustainability of rural DWS&S systems.
- The distribution of **policy, regulatory and service delivery roles** must further be defined and clarified.
- The government must promote and act on **demonopolisation policies** that also benefit from opportunities for **ownership of community-driven DWS&S systems**. Alternative non-state business models must be duly promoted, supported and financed across rural Tajikistan. **Public-private partnership** policies must be implemented more widely with the involvement of small-scale rural DWS&S service providers.
- A **comprehensive capacity support programme** must be developed, and systemic support provided to duty-bearing entities (ministries/agencies, service providers and educational institutions), with a focus on capacity development and retention in rural areas.

As rightly noted by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation (Léo Heller): ‘Tajikistan is known as a champion of water at the global level. The government must now become a champion of sanitation and drinking water for its own people.’⁸

⁷ UNDP and Oxfam GB (2022). Policy report: Tariff policy for drinking water supply in rural Tajikistan: Towards a full-cost recovery mechanism and rights-based water governance.

⁸ Léo Heller, UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation (2015). End of mission statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water supply, Tajikistan, 4–12 August 2015.

Tajikistan Water Supply & Sanitation Project (Phase III)

Executive Summary



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