



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

Construction norms and standards for rural water supply and sanitation systems in Tajikistan:

Barriers and pathways to investment prospects

May 2022



*This document provides a summary of the full policy report: *Construction norms and standards for rural water supply and sanitation systems 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.

Tajikistan's rural water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector is characterised by a set of inadequacies that have resulted from persistent degradation due to lack of investment, financial support and capacity to maintain the systems over the past three decades. As is often reported, one of the root causes is in part linked to the continued application of **outdated and stringent norms and standards** in the design and construction of WASH projects in rural communities. Views from stakeholders have revealed that those norms pose serious negative consequences on **cost-effectiveness, technical efficiencies and due processes (administrative/permit procedures)**. Implementers have therefore sought to use *adapted, flexible and low-cost solutions* applicable for rural WASH systems. The urge to update and revise norms and standards has primarily been driven by the need to 1) stimulate greater investment and financing of the rural WASH sector, 2) reduce the costs of constructing rural WASH systems, and 3) encourage innovative approaches and know-how to improve the technical efficiencies of water supply systems (WSS).

With the Tajikistan Water Supply and Sanitation (TajWSS) project's consistent support since 2009, considerable improvements have been achieved, with the revision of a number of state norms and standards along with development of new ones. Notable improvements addressed a bulk of often-reported issues related to: optimization of daily consumption norms to local conditions, reduced capacity requirements to meet water demands, relaxed firefighting requirements, reduced areas under sanitation protection zones, relaxed requirement for reserve equipment, adapted norms for fencing materials, use of low-cost materials, products and services, reductions in baseline documents (design), among others. All those improvements are claimed to have reduced (or will potentially reduce) the costs of WSS projects by about 25 to 50%, while UNDP estimates suggest an average 44% reduction in project costs.

However, further analysis has revealed that these recent achievements are characterised at large as **simplifications and relaxations** of requirements, as an 'immediate' response to often-reported issues. For the most part, the new norms and standards **do not address the systemic issues** that present some of the greatest challenges the WASH sector has endured. These challenges relate to four problem areas: 1) severe lack of capacity, practical know-how and innovations, 2) unrealistic bill of quantities (BoQ)¹ – linked price estimations enforced for works, products and services, 3) poor cost-effectiveness and technical efficiency, and 4) extremely lengthy administrative procedures for obtaining permits for small-scale rural WASH projects. The analysis has therefore concluded that present norms and standards a) are *insufficiently adaptive and not flexible*, b) are *still inadequate, causing unnecessarily higher investment and operational costs*, c) *lack applicability of innovations, pilot demonstrations, technological know-how and generally openness to new practices and approaches*.

¹ A BoQ is a document used in tendering in the construction industry in which materials, parts and labour (and their costs) are itemized.

On this basis, this policy report suggests **four policy recommendations** that derive from rural experience in Tajikistan. These can be listed as follows:

- ❏ Capacities within responsible institutions (primarily the Committee for Architecture and Construction and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and its Sanitary and Epidemiological Services Agency), along with entities licensed to carry out design and construction require systematic improvements to effectively apply norms and standards and adequately foresee prospects of updates. An **immediate step** would be to develop a **comprehensive capacity strengthening support programme** based on a thorough **performance assessment** of responsible institutions on the subject area. Such support must include a) development of modern curricula and teaching methods at design institutes and engineering schools (i.e. technical universities), and b) regular knowledge sharing and best practice exchange platform for design and construction professionals. Establishment of a community of practice at national level may well be a practical strategy forward.
- ❏ Enforced price estimations for works, products and services need to be revisited in the immediate term with methodologies that consider up-to-date local market prices as well as local innovative practices. Corresponding regulations and methodologies need to be developed and/or revised.
- ❏ Superfluous and unnecessary requirements still persist in the present norms and standards, and most of the applied changes have only partially addressed the issues. The *Gosudarstvennie Normi i Pravila* (state norms and regulations) (GNiP) RT 40-60-2017 Rural Drinking Water Supply (2017) requires further updates, with the upgrade of 'target classification' to a system of above 5,000 people (at least for settlements in the 5,000–10,000 population category).
- ❏ Administrative procedures and permit-obtaining processes have remained lengthy with almost no change since 2012. Development partners and implementers must document their experiences and lessons learned must be conveyed systematically to advocate for justified changes in each stage of design and construction. As an immediate step, implementers must a) record duration of each stage of procedure/process in practice, and then b) quantify and monetise time and resources spent as the processes become extensive.

From immediate to long-term perspectives, the policy agenda should promote the following targets towards further change in norms and standards that lead to more efficiencies in investment and operational costs for WASH services in rural Tajikistan.

Immediate targets (up to 2030)

- ↪ Performance assessment of responsible institutions on application of norms and standards (including collection of views from implementers and other stakeholders).
- ↪ Development of a comprehensive capacity support programme that is based on institutional performance assessments (featuring principles such as: international best practices, innovations, technological know-how, flexible approaches for pilot demonstrations).
- ↪ Establishment of a community of practice or a related network for professionals, implementers, development partners and national and local authorities to share knowledge, practices, issues and lessons learned. This will help further advocate update of current GNiPs with consideration of feedback from development partners.
- ↪ Bringing normative price estimations for works, products and services (enforced at design stage for BoQ preparation) in conformity with actual local market prices and rural practices. Present price estimations are extremely low compared with market prices.

- ↪ Assessing foreseen impact of expanding GNiP RT 40-60-2017 Rural Drinking Water Supply application for systems serving more than 5,000 people. Adequate justifications must feed into further policy work.
- ↪ Thorough documentation of the duration of each stage of administrative/permit procedures for implemented projects to further inform policy makers on the impact of such burden on WASH project costs and efficiencies.
- ↪ Identify improved water supply (WS) and sanitation models that have been successfully implemented and/or piloted in rural settings, and define scalability potential for further integration within present norms and standards.
- ↪ Documentation of low-cost and cost-efficient practices available in rural Tajikistan, and bring related international best practices.
- ↪ Requirements for water quality standards and monitoring must be brought into conformity with WHO standards.

Long-term targets (beyond 2030)

- ↪ Provide consistent technical and financial support for the implementation of endorsed *capacity strengthening support programmes* for responsible stakeholders in the application and development of improved norms and standards.
- ↪ Update sanitary norms and standards with consideration of new and improved WS and sanitation models introduced by development partners and others.
- ↪ Consistent updates advocated for norms and standards beyond GNiP 2017 and Sanitation Norms and Standards (SanPiNs) (2021) on a case-by-case basis, along with redefining targets and objectives within the reform programmes.
- ↪ Complete and up-to-date integration of new and improved WS and sanitation models within the present norms and standards, for those defined as replicable across rural Tajikistan.
- ↪ Reduction of time frames to a reasonable extent for undergoing administrative and permit-obtaining procedures. Support in that area must be rendered in harmony with strengthening capacities that will help achieve the objective.
- ↪ Knowledge about international best practices, technological know-how and innovations must be consistently collected and communicated to responsible institutions (training) to further inform policy change.

Over its 13-years' experience, TajWSS has demonstrated that policy dialogue and consultations supported with sufficient evidence from the field and stakeholders do in fact translate to policy change. Transforming established mindsets and Soviet master documents to more progressive ones is a difficult and lengthy process, as the experience of other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States shows. On the other hand, the noted weak capacities, knowledge and awareness among responsible authorities and institutions are now seen as barriers for future constructive changes. Unless a comprehensive approach is developed and systematically supported in the immediate to long term, the noted incremental improvements in the norms and standards will have little impact on the overall viability of the WASH sector in rural Tajikistan.

Tajikistan Water Supply & Sanitation Project (Phase III)

Executive Summary



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