How water kiosks can improve access to water for the urban poor

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Kenya Case Study

Approximately 23% of Kenya's population of 31 million live in urban centres, with three million people living in Nairobi.

For centuries, Small Water Enterprises (SWEs) have supplied water to informal urban settlements. Incremental development has provided water quality information.

Introduction

How small water kiosks can improve access to water for the urban poor

In many low-income towns and cities, large numbers of people live in informal settlements that are not connected to piped water networks. Historically, they have been served by unofficial service providers, known as Small Water Enterprises (SWEs), which have not been seen as having legitimate status by government agencies.

However, there are emerging opportunities for the development of specific and economically efficient SWE systems. Kenya's operation is a form of SWE that offers good potential for expansion, providing water quality information.

The Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company Limited (NCWSC) has been working with informal urban groups in Nairobi to improve their access to water supply. The project, which has previously been identified, has been working to reduce the amount of unaccounted for water.

The Nairobi water supply network has been expanded over many years, but it has failed to keep pace with demand. Approximately 20% of Kenya's population of 31 million live in informal urban settlements. Incremental development has provided water quality information.

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Key components of effective water kiosk services

For improvement to services provided by SWEs to take place, it needs to be acknowledged that even small improvements can be significant. A particularly promising approach is to establish standards and best practices for kiosks. However, before new financial and operational models can be introduced, existing challenges need to be overcome. These challenges include establishing and monitoring water sales and revenues, and ensuring the reliability of water supplies.

What are Small Water Enterprises? (SWEs)

Most often these are informal entities that provide water supplies to rural areas, supplying tap water to individual households and small kiosk-like facilities. They effectively provide water supplies to a very large number of people, even in the most remote areas. To make it possible for SWEs to continue to build on existing infrastructure, several additional services can be provided. These include substitution of water supplies, such as kiosks, due to the high cost of water or due to declining supplies. SWEs can also be used to improve the quality of water supplies, such as by replacing illegal water connections with legal ones, as well as by improving the efficiency of meters and billing systems. In some cases, these improvements can be made directly to the water supply system, such as by installing meters or improving water quality.

Engagement of the community

A need exists for an active participation of the local community in the development and implementation of the water supply system. This participation is essential in order to ensure the sustainability of the water supply system and to ensure that the community can benefit from the improvements.

Water sales and revenues

The ability to sell water at a reasonable price is critical to the success of water supply projects. This ability needs to be established and maintained, such that customers can afford to pay for water and that the water supply system can be sustained. The ability to sell water at a reasonable price is critical to the success of water supply projects.

Safeguards could be put in place to ensure that the relationship between the utility and SWEs is fair and transparent. This includes ensuring that any formal agreements that exist are fair to all parties; that contracts and agreements between the utility and a kiosk operator should be both fair and enforceable, and that should identify the responsibilities of both parties; that formal agreements may be entered into only if the relationship is acceptable to the community and to the parties involved; and that any disputes should be resolved in a timely manner. It is important that the relationship between the utility and SWEs is fair and transparent, as well as that any disputes that may arise are resolved in a fair and timely manner.