

Overview

The cases presented here are drawn from “best practice” case study papers produced for the Water and Poverty Initiative, a partnership of leading international organizations intended to create a greater awareness for advocacy and the development of strategies to achieve the potential of water as a key element in poverty reduction. The focus of these case studies is the link between water and poverty reduction.

Each seeks to demonstrate its own examples of practical ways of improving the role of water in poverty reduction. None are comprehensive or complete, all mix success with elements that could be improved, and all demonstrate clearly that water management alone is not enough. The sustainable reduction of poverty relies on a wide range of factors of which water is only one.

In many cases, the initiatives presented here were received with great enthusiasm by the poor communities where they were implemented. This in itself is the best judge of what we should be doing. Poor people are the hardest critics and have little time for actions that do not meet their needs, capabilities, or priorities. That we are able to present such a wide range of effective actions is both important and encouraging.

This richness can be found in the individual case study reports here. In reading the case study papers, ask basic questions such as whose water security is enhanced, what water security problems the poor faced, how they coped, how they were organized, how they made use of new opportunities, which outside actors were involved, what they did, what were the impacts of interventions, and how sustainable are the benefits. You may be interested in reading the accompanying analysis, *Water and Poverty Initiative Case Study Papers: What We Can Learn and What We Must Do* (Frans and Soussan).

The case studies presented here cover countries and regions in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. The cases vary considerably in more than one way. For instance, the smallest case contributor is the island state of Kiribati in Micronesia. Its size is only 20% bigger than that of Singapore, and Kiribati has less than 100,000 inhabitants. Another case is from the People's Republic of China (PRC), 10,000 times as big and with a population of 1.28 billion. The case study from Jiangxi Province in Eastern PRC involved some 40 million people.

Only one of the cases—that of the treadle pump—is at the stage where it is being widely replicated. Half of the case studies are experimental while others are at varying more advanced stages of development. Most cases are well established in the sense that they have been operational for several years and have thus stood the test of time. However, a few cases have been initiated only relatively recently and highlight how agencies that have been generally conservative in the past are taking on broader, more participatory, poverty-focused, and holistic approaches to water resource development.

In some cases, one or more government agencies are the key actors from outside the local community, while in others, a nongovernment organization (NGO) took the lead while joint government-NGO action was reported in a few cases, as was international donor initiative and private sector leadership. Most cases involved poor men and women, while some focused on either only women or only men.

Many cases deal with improved access to quality water, or pro-poor economic growth and livelihood improvement. Other cases focus on management of the environment, pro-poor water governance, and community capacity building and empowerment.

Numerous case studies confirm that in schemes that do not specifically aim at reaching the poor, the relatively more prosperous sections of the community reap most of the benefits from water resources.

Several of these case studies indicate that government agencies can deliver expected outputs and are even able to reach the poor efficiently and effectively. Thus, in spite of all the rhetoric against government agencies, there is hope!

The single most obvious idea confirmed in most case study papers is that poverty reduction is possible only if the poor have secure access to safe and sufficient water for domestic and productive purposes. The overview presented here clearly demonstrates that there are many practical and cost-effective ways of making a difference. Improving different aspects of water management can and does have a direct and material impact on poverty.