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Process of Developing Urban Wastewater Policy for Afghanistan xCatering to Decentralized Wastewater Management Needs

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Introduction

In Afghanistan, the responsibility for creating the policy framework for the provision of services for urban areas falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Urban Development Affairs (MUDA). These services include urban wastewater management. During the post-Taliban reconstruction era, a first policy entitled Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Sector Policy was formulated in 2005 (MUDH 2005). This served as a guiding document for the restructuring taking place of the sector within the Ministry at the time, which involved the separation of constitutional, regulatory, and operational functions. On the aspect of 'sewerage' referred to in the title of the policy, however, the policy remained sparse and did not reflect the actual situation of wastewater management on-ground which consists largely of on-site systems. MUDA is currently in the process of reviewing the wastewater aspects of the 2005 policy with the aim of making it realistic, catering to the decentralized needs of wastewater management, and promoting sustainability. The process started in April 2012 and is estimated to take one year until completion. This paper describes the existing situation and the process of policy revision taking place.

Existing Situation

Wastewater Practices

The existing wastewater management practices in the urban areas can be summarized as follows. **There are no centralized sewer networks and associated treatment facilities in the country.** Surface runoff is collected in surface drainage channels. There are a few localized sewer systems, transporting one part of or mixed wastewater. For example, in the city of Herat, an old box channel takes the greywater from the old city to the river downstream. In the city of Kabul, the blocks of Macroyan apartments constructed several decades ago by the Russians, were equipped with a decentralized sewage collection and treatment system which is still operational, albeit with a low treatment efficiency.

In general, most houses in the urban areas have their own toilet sanitation facilities. The sanitation systems tend to be either dry systems, mostly the traditional raised-vault latrine, or flush toilets attached to soakage wells or septic tanks. In the larger cities, the trend is to prefer the water based flush toilets if the economic situation allows. Greywater is separated out and disposed off in soakage wells, collection ponds, surface channels, or in an open area. This reliance on self-constructed, unregulated on-site sanitation systems has led to groundwater pollution, notably in Kabul city.

Wastewater Aspects in the Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Sector Policy

While the 2005 policy establishes sound principles for the urban water sector such as cost recovery, decentralization, and technical standardization, it does not provide a specific and relevant framework for wastewater management. In essence, it does not reflect the reality on ground. The policy concerns itself with 'sewerage services to urban and peri-urban communities'; yet, sewerage networks are barely existent. The policy also concerns itself

with ‘the collection, treatment and safe disposal of urban wastewater’; yet, there is no defined scope of the types of wastewater or a guiding framework for their management. Critically, the policy states that ‘management of solid waste and product of traditional toilet waste is specifically excluded’; yet a large part of domestic sanitation facilities consist of the traditional dry toilet. Since management of traditional sanitation systems is not looked at in any other national policy either, a significant portion of the population remains excluded.

Revision of Wastewater Aspects in Urban Policy

In carrying out the revision of the wastewater aspects in the urban policy, MUDA is taking into account the existing legal framework and is focusing both on the process of policy formulation as well as the content of the policy developed. The key elements of this review process are described below.

Compliance with Existing Legal Framework and National Priorities

The policy seeks to comply with the existing legal framework, which consists of the Environmental Law (2007) and the Water Law (2009). In particular, the Environmental Law highlights the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle and the Water Law adheres to the Integrated Water Resources Management approach (Official Gazette No. 912 2007; UNEP & KRBP (ed) 2009). The policy will also align itself with the national priorities stated in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy papers.

Stakeholder Involvement

In the policy development process, MUDA is incorporating both horizontally-aligned and vertically-aligned stakeholders. The horizontally-aligned stakeholders include other ministries and governmental bodies having linkages to the urban wastewater sector¹ in consideration of the complete wastewater flow chain and the criteria of sustainability (see below). The vertically-aligned stakeholders comprise the technical departments of MUDA in the 34 provinces of the country.

Geographical and Sector Scope

In an initial agreement with the stakeholders, the geographical and sector scopes have been tentatively decided. The geographical scope will comprise urban and peri-urban areas. The sector scope will look at the complete wastewater flow chain from the collection to disposal or reuse. The types of wastewater that will be addressed are: surface runoff, domestic mixed sewage, domestic source-separated wastewater (greywater, blackwater, yellowwater, excreta) and industrial wastewater.

Sustainability

The criteria of sustainability recommended by the Sustainable Sanitation Alliance will form the guiding framework for sustainability. These criteria are health and hygiene, environment and natural resources, technology and operation, financial and economic issues and socio-cultural and institutional aspects.

References

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¹ The horizontally-aligned stakeholders have been identified as the Ministry of Energy and Water, Afghan Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Corporation, Independent Directorate for Local Governance, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Ministry of Mines, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, National Environment Protection Agency, and Kabul Municipality.