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# WASH-FIN KENYA PROJECT BRIEF

## ACCESS TO COMMERCIAL FINANCE FOR WASH IN KENYA

Looking back on SUWASA  
and to the future with WASH-FIN

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This WASH-FIN Brief looks back at the experience of the USAID Sustainable Water and Sanitation in Africa (SUWASA) program in promoting access to commercial financing for water and sanitation in Kenya. SUWASA ran from 2010 to 2015, building on accomplishments of the Kenyan government in advancing sector reforms in the context of devolution and decentralization.<sup>1</sup> This brief highlights the process, successes, and challenges of commercial financing for WASH and identifies lessons for moving forward with continued commercial financing under the new USAID WASH-FIN program (see box below).

### WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE FINANCING (WASH-FIN)

The five-year Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Financing (WASH-FIN) program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and began in October 2016. Tetra Tech leads WASH-FIN implementation with support from Open Capital Advisors, Segura Consulting, and Global Credit Rating. It is managed by the USAID Water Office, with support from the Global Climate Change Office, under the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment (E3). WASH-FIN seeks to close financing gaps to achieve universal access to water and sanitation services through sustainable and creditworthy business models, increased public funding, and expanded market finance for infrastructure investment.

### BACKGROUND: DECADES OF SECTOR REFORMS AND A NEW CONSTITUTION SET THE STAGE FOR SUWASA

Kenya has made steady progress undertaking sector reforms since the 1990s, emphasizing governance and equitable and sustainable service delivery. These reforms, which were crucial to enabling access to commercial financing, were well underway when the 2002 Water Act was enacted. The Act further advanced the reform agenda culminating in the following critical reforms:

- Separation of water resource management and development from service delivery
- Creation of autonomous Water Service Providers (WSPs) incorporated under the Companies Act that are responsible for operation and maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure, which was developed and owned by Water Service Boards to ring fence water revenues; and
- Creation of an independent Water Services Regulatory Board (WASREB), and the Water Services Trust Fund (now Water Sector Trust Fund [WSTF]).

This period of reforms helped to instill a commercial mindset in WSPs, which the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program built on through microfinance pilots and commercial borrowing efforts. A partnership between the government and the Bank further enhanced this approach by establishing a regulatory performance index and conducting shadow credit ratings to establish creditworthiness. These tools gave both WSPs and lenders an objective basis to assess performance and risk.

Kenya had just signed its new constitution in August 2010 when SUWASA was getting started. The 2010 constitution established a system of decentralized government and devolved service delivery, including water and sanitation, which was enshrined as a basic right. These reform efforts culminated in the achievement of the water Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in Kenya, one of the few countries to achieve this.

These reforms and achievements laid a strong foundation for the enhancement of commercial financing in the sector, which the SUWASA program built upon. WASH-FIN will continue these efforts.

<sup>1</sup> SUWASA was implemented in six countries: Kenya, Senegal, South Sudan, Mozambique, Zambia and Nigeria, although commercial financing was only pursued in Kenya.

### USAID SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION IN AFRICA (SUWASA)

The SUWASA program in Kenya aimed to promote market finance for bankable utility investments, including supporting WSPs in developing commercially viable projects, and assisting banks with product development for the water sector. Traditionally, grants and concessionary loans from development partners have funded the sector. Estimates suggest that, on average, up to 60% of WASH funding in Kenya comes from donors and the remainder from the public purse with minor contributions from tariffs and households.

A key objective of SUWASA was to contribute to expanding and strengthening the flow of commercial financing to the sector. This would not only increase investment, but also contribute to improving WSP performance as commercially viable entities by instilling the governance, consumer focus, and performance discipline necessary for commercial borrowing.

SUWASA addressed some fundamental challenges: lack of creditworthiness; limited interest in commercial financing due to incentives tied to a reliance on public sources; limited capacity to prepare commercially viable projects; and poor perception of WSPs by commercial banks who had limited understanding of their structure and operation.

SUWASA worked with WSPs to identify viable projects and prepare proper documentation for commercial bank interest. SUWASA also worked with commercial banks to improve their understanding and ability to serve WSPs.

As such, SUWASA can be considered a precursor to present day discussions on blending public and private finance to close the financing gap.

### THE PROCESS OF COMMERCIAL FINANCING

The SUWASA activity began with a pilot in Kisumu that raised KES 20.1 million (USD 245,863) to extend piped infrastructure, benefitting 8,975 people in an informal settlement. The success of this pilot led to identification of other WSPs for assistance, based on five key criteria: sufficiency of water sources, ability to meet operating and maintenance costs, creditworthiness, strength of governance and management commitment, and the financial viability of proposed projects. Eight WSPs were subsequently selected: Kisumu, Embu, Thika, Meru, Muranga South, Muranga, Nyeri, and Mathira.

### PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

SUWASA supported each WSP to prioritize a pipeline of projects focusing on financial viability, potential for getting subsidies, increase in connections and water capacity, contribution to WSP income, and prospect of a quick turnaround to repay debt.

Once the projects were agreed upon, SUWASA assisted the WSPs in the following areas: undertaking market assessments focusing on household willingness and ability to pay; building capacity in how to engage communities and households to get their buy-in; assessing the debt capacity of the WSP to ensure creditworthiness; developing financial models to ensure loan repayment; analyzing the impact of any subsidies or credit enhancements on the model; developing a project implementation plan; and compiling all information into a final proposal for submission to commercial banks.



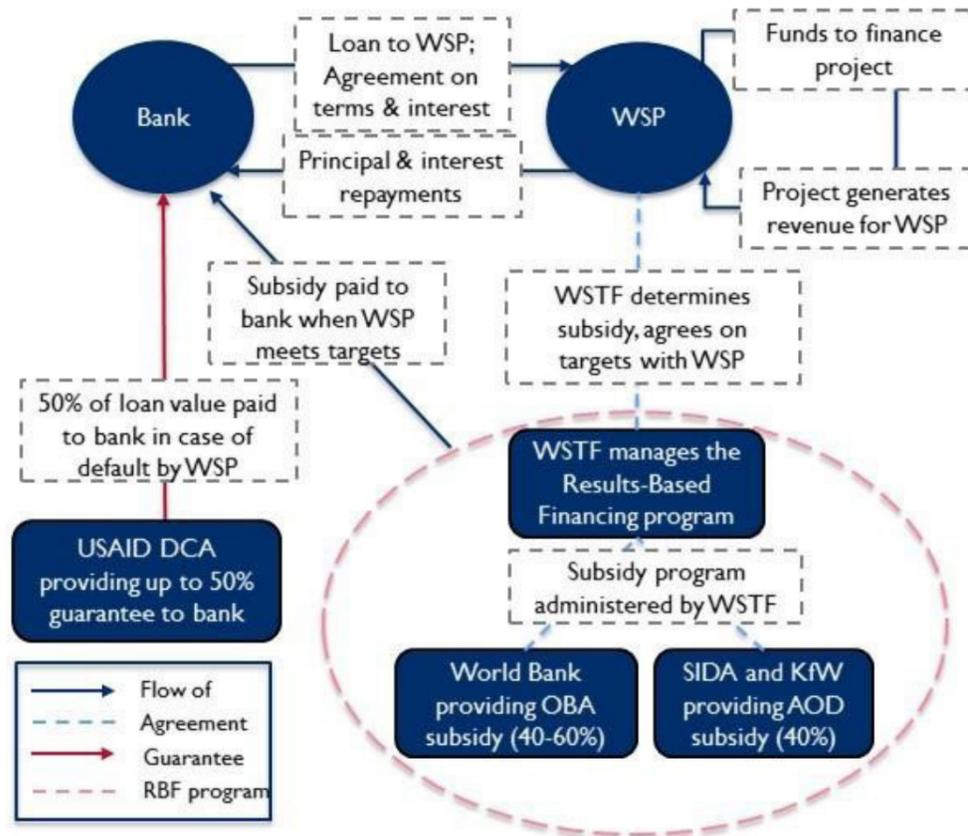
**KISUMU, KENYA:** Trenching and laying pipes to supply Nyamasaria residents with clean and affordable water; pilot commercially viable water delivery model for low income urban area to spur access to clean and affordable water. Over 40,000 people in Kisumu and Nakuru will benefit from these models. Photo Credits: Erick Asubwa, Intern, SUWASA Kenya in Kisumu

## OBTAINING FINANCING

In addition to supporting WSPs through this process, SUWASA was also involved in identifying sources of finance. Three Kenyan commercial banks (Sidian Bank, KCB Bank, and Housing Finance Bank) were selected based on their experience in the water sector, and ability to complete the process to secure a Development Credit Authority (DCA) partial credit guarantee agreement with USAID, which demonstrated an understanding of the risks involved, and a commitment to have the tools in place to mitigate those risks.

SUWASA also provided capacity-building support to the banking sector to build understanding of the WSP market and in developing loan products specific to the WASH sector. SUWASA also supported an introduction to the DCA guarantee for banks that lacked one.

**FIGURE 1. FLOW OF FUNDS**



As part of the loan application process, SUWASA linked WSPs with the banks, and played a backstopping role in transaction facilitation. SUWASA further assisted the WSPs to reach out to and apply for Aid on Delivery (AOD) funding from the German Development Bank (KfW), and Output-Based Aid (OBA) from the World Bank, through the WSTF. In these schemes, a WSP obtains a loan from a commercial bank with an understanding that a portion of this loan will be paid off as a subsidy from either AOD or OBA once the WSP has delivered agreed targets (see Figure 1). Once the deliverables are verified, the subsidy is paid by WSTF directly to the commercial bank. It should be noted that for OBA, at the point when subsidy is agreed and signed, WSTF releases 10% of the funding to either the commercial bank, as the first repayment on the loan, if the commercial bank has already disbursed the loan to the WSP; or directly to the WSP as mobilization funds.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER SECTOR ACTORS: THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS

SUWASA's success was due in large part to the fact that it worked in a favorable enabling environment conducive to cooperation. For its part, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation embraced the idea of commercial financing as a tool for the sector; county governments provided letters of no objection, which were required by the banks; WASREB provided strong regulatory oversight that banks look to when underwriting a utility loan; the World Bank and KfW provided the financing for OBA and AOD; WSTF facilitated access to the OBA and AOD; and USAID, through DCA, provided the guarantees that made it easier for the commercial banks to lend to a nascent sector. In effect, the success of SUWASA was the success of a multilayered partnership involving actors with different roles but willing to pull in the same direction.

## RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

As indicated earlier, SUWASA supported eight WSPs in developing financially viable and technically feasible proposals and applying for commercial loans from three SUWASA-supported local banks. Six of the eight WSPs were successful, borrowing a total of KES 286 million (USD 3.2 million) with an average loan size of KES 47.66 million (USD 534,125). USAID DCA partial credit guarantees were utilized in each instance and all loans benefited from either an OBA or AOD subsidy, which ensured inclusive investments. The projects provided over 8,000 connections benefitting nearly 20,000 people. None of the WSPs defaulted on their loans. Three loans have been repaid and three are on schedule to be repaid. Four of the six WSPs have gone back to the market since, all of them requiring either a DCA or OBA/AOD subsidy. Two of the three banks have also provided other loans to WSPs.

Aside from successfully leveraging commercial financing to the sector, SUWASA had longer-lasting impacts. First, the idea of commercial financing has taken root, as evidenced by WSPs that did not originally participate having since proceeded to borrow from the market. Most significantly, eight WSPs are in discussions to borrow from the capital markets through issuance of a bond through the Kenya Pooled Water Fund Facility (KPWF). At the same time, another 11 WSPs are targeted to receive support for commercial financing under WASH-FIN.

Second, the capacity of both WSPs and commercial banks to interact was strengthened. SUWASA contributed significantly to laying a strong foundation for the sector to continue pursuing commercial financing.

## KEY CHALLENGES

Despite the success, the process faced several delays related to three main factors. First, WSPs are required to obtain letters of no objection from their county governments to procure a loan. Depending on the understanding of the counties and the timing for engaging them, some WSPs were delayed or prevented from borrowing as there was resistance to providing these letters of no objection. This experience speaks to the challenge associated with the ownership of the WSPs as public entities, and thus subject to more bureaucracy than a private company. Delays were also occasioned by limited coordination with other municipal service such as roads authorities who must be consulted for road cuttings. Limited capacity within the WSPs contributed to the lead time from commencement of discussions to actual transaction being rather long.

The second challenge was related to resettlement costs. Installation of services, especially in informal settlements, generally involves resettling affected communities. In conventional donor-funded projects, funds for resettlement are provided by the government. In the case of these commercial transactions, the funds were to be provided by the WSPs, an item which was not budgeted for and thus contributed to delays (and what the WSPs saw as unplanned costs).

The third challenge was the WSPs' limited understanding of the nuances around OBA and AOD processes, which led to some spending time applying for both and ending up not getting either, or applying for one and then after failing one, trying the other. Both processes resulted in loss of time and frustration. As some of the WSPs were also unaware of which application rules to follow for each subsidy speaks to a need for stronger dissemination of requirements and coordination among donors and local partner institutions.

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## GOING FORWARD UNDER WASH-FIN

SUWASA operated in a context of an evolving institutional setup coupled with a devolution and decentralization process. As indicated earlier, advances made under SUWASA were acknowledged and have been spurred forward through efforts such as the USAID Kenya Integrated WASH (KIWASH) Project, Kenya Pooled Water Fund (KPWF), and indeed WASH-FIN.

As these current efforts begin to consolidate, it is worth highlighting some key lessons from SUWASA to ensure success. This is essential as meeting Kenya's universal access goals will require all resources to be brought to bear, including commercial financing.

**Creditworthiness involves more than good financial performance.** Good governance and management integrity was highly valued by the commercial banks, and they considered it one of the most important criteria when lending to WSPs. This was the case with one WSP which despite a significant drop in WASREB's Impact Report ranking, secured a loan for KES 81.3 million (USD 1.24 million). The bank noted management and governance as key factors to approving the loan. WSPs striving to access commercial financing must focus equal attention on good governance. This involves good internal systems as well as good relationships with the board and the county.

**Open communication is crucial and can make or break the process.** Under SUWASA, WSPs that engaged early with their boards and the county benefitted from political buy-in and alignment of critical-path procedures and approvals. In one instance, lack of communications hampered implementation of a regulator approved and sanctioned tariff increase that was required for commercial viability. Similarly, WSPs also benefitted from proactive communications with the community, customers, and banks. Early and regular communications with internal and external stakeholders helps to manage expectations, and keeps the process moving forward.

**Commercial success requires community engagement.** SUWASA demonstrated that weak community engagement can undermine the vision of socially responsible commercialization. For example, in Kisumu, the community did not fully understand the payment scheme for water connections, which impacted their willingness to pay. Without these connections, the project would not generate sufficient revenue for debt service. The ability and willingness to pay by the households established the extent of commercial viability, and where subsidies would be required. This

in turn informed the design of payment schemes for connections and the need for operational resources. Incorporating community engagement in the final project structuring is therefore critical in creating less risky projects.



Technicians installing pre-paid meter.

**Credit enhancements improve the credit risk profile of a lending opportunity.** SUWASA relied on credit enhancements to support WSPs in structuring transactions that appealed to banks. USAID DCA partial credit guarantees were utilized for all six loans and each was further enhanced by an OBA or AOD subsidy. Bundling these enhancements into a blended finance structure allowed WSPs to leverage their good governance and performance, in partnership with donors, to make needed investments on an inclusive basis that were repaid from future tariff revenue. The enhancements further introduced banks to a new sector, thus contributing to financial sector deepening.



Team inspecting treatment plant.

**The need for technical assistance and support remains.** SUWASA technical assistance supported WSPs in preparing commercially viable projects as candidates for bank lending. As the reform process continues under the 2016 Water Act, much work remains, and WSPs must be self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses in accessing market finance. Even when an optimal level of governance and performance is achieved, WSPs will not necessarily have the internal capabilities or capacity to prepare bankable projects for financing. Technical assistance from donor programs such as WASH-FIN can help, especially at this early stage when the idea of commercial financing is being entrenched in the sector. However, a key question remains on how development partner programs like WASH-FIN can strengthen sector institutions such as WSTF and WASREB and associations such as the Water Service Providers Association (WASPA), to effectively facilitate this support. In the long term, the goal must be to have this capacity institutionalized within WSPs, including the option of WSPs procuring these services from local consulting firms.

**Technical assistance and outreach is needed for banks and institutional investors.** Closing financial transactions requires not only the borrower, but also the lenders. SUWASA experience showed that banks and institutional investors remain unfamiliar with the WASH sector at best, and at worst, discount the sector as a viable part of their portfolio. Like any nascent sector, experience and time are required for banks to understand the risks and opportunities. Not all will see the sector as viable. Technical assistance and "market making" outreach to inform the sources of finance will remain a critical part of development partner support, including playing the role of intermediary.



Nakuru, Kenya: Children taking hygiene lesson at pre-paid meter.



Nairobi, Kenya: SUWASA and Tetra Tech ARD team.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that with a favorable enabling environment and a spirit of collaboration, there is space for commercial financing in the WASH sector in Kenya. Indeed, despite it being a relatively new approach and facing some challenges, SUWASA catalyzed KES 286 million (USD 3.2 million) in private capital benefitting over 20,000 Kenyans with improved access to WASH services.

As WASH-FIN commenced in 2016, the reform process advanced again with the enactment of the 2016 Water Act. This law aligns the “regulation, management and development of water resources and water and sewerage services” with the 2010 constitution. The Act maintains many institutions including WASREB, changes some such as WSTF, and creates new institutions including Water Works Development Agencies (WWDAs) for investment in national infrastructure. Sector institutions are still absorbing the implications of the new Act, and WASH-FIN is working to sensitize financial institutions to the subsequent opportunities and risks. Key questions to be clarified include, who owns the WSPs and what rights and obligations are conferred on them by this ownership with regard to commercial financing? How can they be brought on board to support commercial financing and what kind of technical assistance will be required to facilitate their engagement? These questions focus on governance, which as noted earlier, is critical to success of commercial financing and cannot therefore be overemphasized.

Another critical issue that must be considered is the interest rate cap policy. As WASH service providers are generally perceived as more risky borrowers, an interest rate cap, while implemented in the interest of the general populace, may make it more difficult for the banks to extend credit at favorable terms. The effect of this policy may hamper increased lending to the sector and is therefore an important consideration for all stakeholders.



Water vendors collecting water from private water operator tanks.

That SUWASA was successful is also shown by the rollout of other programs on commercial financing in the country. Key among these are USAID’s WASH-FIN, which is intended to grow the activities undertaken under SUWASA both in terms of number of WSPs reached as well as commercial/private funds leveraged; KPWF, which is looking to issue a bond for WASH companies; and the World Bank-funded Performance-Based Financing, intended to leverage commercial financing for efficiency improvements. All these programs are targeting the same WSPs. The extent to which commercial financing and indeed each of these programs will succeed, is a function of government coordination and development partner collaboration.

Finally, the promise of commercial finance must be tempered with the reality that, as in other countries, public funds are required to deliver equitable services and surmount the challenges of an ongoing devolution process. This was demonstrated during SUWASA by the fact that to be commercially viable, each loan required multiple credit enhancements and considerable technical assistance. KIWASH and KPWF efforts have the same requirement.

FIGURE 2: WASH-FIN APPROACH



In Kenya as elsewhere, WSPs have generally inherited old and dilapidated infrastructure which requires significant investment to upgrade. Rapid economic growth concentrated in urban areas, and drought and other extreme weather events compound the need for these investments. At the same time, the low level of creditworthiness of WSPs means that there is limited capacity to take on commercial debt.

It is sobering to consider that per the 2016 WASREB Impact Report, the total cost to achieve 100% water supply by 2030 is estimated at KES 1.7 trillion (USD 17 billion), while the available government budget is KES 592.4 billion (USD 5.9 billion), leaving a shortfall of KES 1.2 trillion (USD 12 billion). Meanwhile, SUWASA only helped to raise KES 286 million (USD 3.2 million) whilst WASH-FIN is targeting USD 20 million over three years. It is clear that commercial financing can only play a small, but important, part in closing the financing gap.

However, the improvements in governance, and the discipline required for consumer-focused utilities to borrow and perform as commercial entities, brings a payoff that is difficult to quantify.

This means that programs like WASH-FIN must pay attention to blending and leveraging of public funds with private funds. Commercial financing must be seen as a component of the total funding envelope, one that “frees up” scarce public funds to be used strategically to support inclusive investments.

Arguably, where SUWASA succeeded most was in deepening the concept of commercial financing and breaking down the barriers between the WSPs and the commercial banks. It would be interesting to see the degree to which new programs like WASH-FIN can help to bring WSPs to the point where less, or even no credit enhancements are required in the future. In this scenario, WSPs would be fulfilling their mandate under the constitution and the 2016 Water Act.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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