



## **Integration of Water is Key to Achieving Africa's Health Goals**

***AMREF urges building of partnerships and synthesis of interventions for effective and sustainable outcomes***

### **March 2013**

As the world marks World Water Day, AMREF continues to advocate for integration of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in all development programmes, especially health-related interventions. This day was established by the United Nations in 1992 to focus attention on the importance of freshwater and to advocate for the sustainable management of freshwater resources. The theme this year is dedicated to cooperation around water.

From our work in communities, AMREF has learnt that extending access to safe water and basic sanitation, and improving hygiene practices, lowers the incidence of diseases related to water and improves public health, especially for women and children. Lack of clean water and poor water resource management in Africa has had a negative domino effect, resulting in widespread, multifaceted illnesses, costing millions of lives and entrenching a cycle of poverty. This is further complicated by the vagaries of climate change and the global economic crunch. The centrality of water resources to everything – from agriculture, food security and nutrition; to sanitation, hygiene and overall health; to industry, human settlement and development in general – means that WASH has to be at the core of all health intervention efforts.

AMREF advocates for power-balanced partnerships to ensure sustainable results. The AMREF-Dutch Alliance, for example, a partnership that includes several other actors in water and sanitation, has successfully facilitated joint learning and acquisition of grant funding and equity finance for programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. The partnership has improved the ability of Alliance members to network, share knowledge and draw from each others' strengths using a multi-stakeholder approach. Without doubt, working in such quality partnerships is proving to be an effective tool for managing water and sanitation programmes.

Reaching the nearly 312 million people in Africa who do not have access to improved sources of drinking water and another estimated 533 million people with no access to improved sanitation facilities will require concerted effort and cooperation among stakeholders in the WASH sector. For the message that access to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right and essential to life, health and dignity to be widely appreciated, more Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) should be encouraged. Shared intervention efforts with consumers, NGOs, environmental health groups, independent service providers, regulators, donors and governments should be encouraged in all WASH interventions. The Katine Community Partnership model in Soroti District of Uganda exemplifies this principle.

Several partners including Barclays Bank, the Guardian/Observer Newspaper (UK) and AMREF worked together with community members and local government authorities to strengthen community structures and ensure sustainability of interventions, which included WASH activities.

For PPPs to thrive, it is important that there be shared incentives in managing water and sanitation interventions. Delegated management systems should not only deliver the best value for money but should add value over and above that delivered by previous water and sanitation service providers. Importantly, too, PPPs must offer both financial and non-financial incentives for contracting parties and stakeholders, based on transparent and mutually negotiated expectations.

Accountability for service delivery has various complementary layers in delegated water service management. Governments, particularly local authorities, should go beyond policy accountability to actual allocation of sufficient resources for water and sanitation programmes. And to ensure transparency, which is a prerequisite for accountability, AMREF recommends provision of clear and comprehensible information to – and openness to interrogation by – project beneficiaries.

AMREF advocates for shared management of WASH services and facilities to ensure their sustainability. In this regard, it is important that development actors realise the limits of community-managed WASH services. Communities are already burdened with many other development interventions; leaving sustainability of services such as maintenance of water pumps to them is untenable. Instead, development actors should budget for post-implementation activities to ensure sustainable and effective performance of WASH facilities.

Even as we seek ways to improve and develop WASH systems and services, it is important to establish measures to significantly reduce water pollution, increase water quality, significantly improve treatment of waste water treatment and water efficiency by ensuring water is delivered to people as close as possible. AMREF's has made inclusion of household water treatment and human waste treatment a key component of all WASH interventions. In order to achieve this, we stress the need for increased local investment in WASH while also leveraging on international assistance and cooperation.

In recognition of the fact that access to water and sanitation is closely linked to key development and poverty alleviation approaches, AMREF recommends that all African Governments reaffirm their commitment to uphold the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. AMREF further advocates commitment by African governments to the 2005-2015 International Decade for Action 'Water for Life', whose challenge is to focus attention on action-oriented activities and policies that ensure the long-term sustainable management of water resources, including measures to improve sanitation. Achieving the goals of the 'Water for Life' Decade requires sustained commitment, cooperation and investment by all stakeholders from 2005 to 2015 and far beyond. This includes a commitment to marking World Water Day.