

Overview

Its not just health: how domestic water makes money for poor people

- ◆ Although many water supply policies and programmes focus on domestic requirements for drinking, cooking, and washing, very few rural or urban water points are used solely for so-called 'basic needs'. The reality is that water points are used for multiple purposes, combining both domestic and productive uses. This can be true even where supplies are very limited. Productive uses – activities that produce food, money or other products – include bricking making and construction, brewing beer and making ice, or simply growing a few vegetables or fruit trees in the backyard.
- ◆ As this series of case studies illustrates, these 'productive' uses of water points make important contributions to peoples' livelihoods, even when these activities have not been explicitly catered for in designing water supplies.
- ◆ By taking account of 'productive uses' and providing additional water over and above the demand for basic needs, the diversity of livelihood options available to people can be increased and some can escape poverty. From Zimbabwe and South Africa, these stories show us how better water supplies enable people to make money and grow nutritious food.
- ◆ Research shows that supplying water for productive use through domestic systems can be costly. But it is more accessible to the poor – as water supply systems are normally designed to serve everyone – who may be excluded from some other productive water sources such as large irrigation schemes. The income earned by poor people can also help them to contribute to the cost of providing water.
- ◆ These case studies show us that responding to demand often means reaching across traditional sectoral boundaries such as those between rural water supply and irrigation, or urban water supply and livestock. And to maximize benefits from their work, water supply professionals also need to think about helping to address other constraints to earning money and providing food, such as access to knowledge or markets.



Harvesting vegetables at a community garden in southern Zimbabwe

Managing demand

Demand management – controlling the amount of water needed or used – is important for any activity to make the best use of scarce water resources. This is also true for productive water uses based upon mainly domestic or multi-purposes supplies. Options include technologies like the 'bucket kit' marketed in India. For only US\$4, a simple bucket and drip irrigation system can be bought that is ideally suited for backyard irrigation of vegetables or fruit trees. This saves time and, with the right incentives, water.

Health, time and money: other benefits of better water supplies for the local economy

- Better water services not only make people healthy, but able to work and earn, and save money on medical treatment.
- Time and effort spent collecting water can be reduced by improved water supplies. Especially for women and children. Research in India has shown that given opportunities for employment, like handicrafts, this time can be turned into money for poor households.

For more details see: James, A.J., *et al.* 2002 Transforming time into money using water: a participatory study of economics and gender in rural India, *Natural Resources Forum*, 26, pp. 205-217.

Joining-up thinking

An international symposium on 'water, poverty, and productive uses of water at the household level' in South Africa from 21-23 January 2003 will address the current lack of 'joined-up' approaches to water supply for the multiple needs of poor people.

See <http://www.irc.nl/themes/management/prodwat/index.html> for more details.



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