

CASE STUDY

KARACHI:
**NOR ANY DROP TO DRINK: WATER AND GOVERNANCE IN URBAN
PAKISTAN**

Pakistan’s increasingly complex water and sanitation challenges illustrate the problems of rapid urbanization in developing nations already under water stress.

A 2005 survey conducted by Pakistan’s Network for Consumer Protection found that only about 60% of urban populations had access to municipal water. Much of the water piped into homes contained bacteria or chemicals that exceeded the government’s (voluntary) safety standards for tap water, reducing the estimated portion of the population with access to safe water to 20-30%.^{1,2}

Unplanned settlements or *katchi abadis* accommodate almost half of Karachi’s 12 million people. Even where the municipal water network supplies household connections, water often flows intermittently, for only a few hours total each day. The poor residents of *katchi abadis* often depend on private water sellers or unimproved water sources (broken mains, informal community taps, ponds, etc.). Karachi’s private water sector consists of a network of transporters, who obtain water from one of the nine official or many unofficial filling points and move it in tankers to communities. From there, small-scale water carriers deliver water to households.³ These low-income households may pay up to 40 times more than those in higher income neighborhoods with municipal services.⁴

One way to loosen the hold of the “water mafia” in cities such as Karachi would be to strengthen municipal management systems. For socio-cultural and management reasons, the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board recovers revenues from only between 12.5% and 55% of its accounts, leading to constant operating shortfalls. New policies to charge users more appropriately have been adopted but face an uphill battle in implementation by local governments.^{5,6}



Projections based on national data suggest that 52.8 million people in Pakistan will lack access to safe drinking water by 2015 without significant action.⁷ Until very recently, most national water policies have focused on meeting the demands of the agriculture sector, which supplies about 25% of Pakistan's GDP. The government launched a retooled National Drinking Water and Sanitation Policy Implementation Committee in late 2009. Implementation has lagged, and the lack of coordination among federal and local agencies presents a serious obstacle. How communities will respond to these further stresses on drinking water supplies currently depends almost entirely on governance at the sub-district level.^{8, 9, 10}

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