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New Analysis of Multiple-Use Water Services (MUS) Shows Promise for Meeting Health and Livelihood Needs of Rural and Peri-Urban Poor

March 14, 2012, Oakland, Calif.: A [new report](#) from the Pacific Institute examines Multiple-Use Water Services (MUS), a water-provision and management approach that has emerged as a way to realize the poverty alleviation potential of water projects. By connecting livelihoods to water supply, MUS seeks to improve nutrition, boost income, and help the rural and peri-urban poor climb the water ladder to make more sophisticated use of water beyond their basic health needs.

Sustainable water systems will continue to be one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Despite significant efforts and funding, a surprisingly large fraction of water systems have either fallen into disrepair or have been abandoned as water sources are drained, and nearly a billion people still lack access to potable water and two billion lack access to adequate sanitation.

The Pacific Institute report, [*Multiple-Use Water Services \(MUS\): Recommendations for a Robust and Sustainable Approach*](#), provides analysis of the potential benefits of MUS, primary among which is that it reflects the multiple ways in which people have always interacted with their local water sources, and seeks to overcome the fragmented way in which water is currently managed.

“Multiple-Use Water Services is a promising framework for funding and implementation in the water sector that can address basic needs for water to meet health as well as livelihood needs of the poorest,” said Dr. Veena Srinivasan, senior research affiliate in the Pacific Institute International Water and Communities Initiative and lead author of the report. “But as international institutions promote MUS in the water sector, it is important to better understand both its opportunities and challenges. We have analyzed the gaps in the MUS approach and evaluated previous efforts at integration in the water sector to identify lessons learned and recommendations for making MUS implementation more robust and sustainable.”

Traditional projects have largely been designed for single-use (drinking water or irrigation only), and so when they are inevitably used for multiple purposes, it can lead to conflicts over water quantity or quality. Allowing for small-scale productive uses of water in a MUS approach can boost household income and provide incentives to maintain the water service system. The MUS approach also improves food security by allowing the rural and peri-urban to grow their own food – and improving access to fresh food can boost immunity and reduce susceptibility to many diseases that plague the poor.

“Because MUS implementations are relatively new, it is too early to judge the long-term impacts, and more evaluation is needed to test whether such benefits have in fact materialized,” said Meena Palaniappan, director of the Pacific Institute International Water and Communities

Initiative. “But by identifying the potential risks and gaps in the MUS approach, we are able to make recommendations that can help Multiple-Use Water Services implementation efforts avoid pitfalls and provide for the needed robust and sustainable water services over the long haul.”

The researchers conclude that at the individual project level, MUS implementers can address sustainability, equity, and climate resilience through specific technological and institutional systems. At the broader programmatic level, MUS supporting institutions, funding organizations, and governments can provide a supportive environment for more successful projects by better knowledge sharing and development of tools, improved data and research, clearly defining success and accountability, and better coordination and enabling legislation.

Scaling up Multiple-Use Water Services or increasing the number of MUS projects in the field will bring to the fore issues of water conflicts, sustainability of the water resource, and the climate-related impacts. MUS projects also must overcome water quality and public health issues that emerge from connecting domestic and productive water uses and sources. Clearer strategies to address inequity in the distribution of water resources and in MUS projects will be an ongoing effort, as well.

“The goal of this analysis is to ensure that as MUS implementations increase, key issues of sustainability, climate resilience, equity, and public health are addressed in ways that strengthen and improve project outcomes and the ultimate goals of development efforts – to create long-term sustainable change to improve people’s lives,” said Palaniappan.

The report [*Multiple-Use Water Services \(MUS\): Recommendations for a Robust and Sustainable Approach*](#) can be downloaded free of charge from the Pacific Institute website at: www.pacinst.org/reports/MUS. This analysis was made possible through the generous support of the Rockefeller Foundation.

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