

## **Privatise Water Supply in Nairobi**

The water crisis in Nairobi and its environs requires a policy shift and reorientation of attitudes. It calls for a new way of looking at the problem so the life-giving stuff can be made available to all. That is why a suggestion by a visiting Ghanaian MP, Mr Franklin Aheto, that African governments should consider privatising water supply is worth considering. His argument is that it is not enough to call for privatisation for the sake of it. Rate-payers must also understand that water is no longer a free gift of nature.

Talk about privatisation of essential services, like water, education and health, has been in vogue in recent years, especially since the advent of the cost-sharing policy. In fact, the Ministry of Water Resources has been talking of community water management, in which the people themselves take care of their water sources. The problem with Kenyans, however, is that we lack the drive to implement the policies, whose overall objective is to ensure sustainable resource use. Nairobi, for instance, has been in the news in the recent past as councillors haggled over the modalities of privatising supply, some sections welcoming the idea and others resisting it for parochial, and most probably selfish, reasons.

The naked truth is that the council, in its present structure, can no longer provide essential services to the ratepayers. It lacks the resources and the motivation to make things happen. In fact, for all practical purposes, the council is broke. Many of those who have been running it have preoccupied themselves with acquiring material wealth.

The advantage of privatising services, like the water supply, is that delivery will be greatly enhanced. Private establishments are known for quality and effective service. They will, therefore, do a much better job of collecting revenue, thus boosting the government's kitty through taxes. The water crisis facing Nairobi and its environs should jolt City Hall and other local authorities as well as the Ministry of Water Resources to think of more innovative ways to ensure a constant supply. Privatisation and community water management should be tried as soon as possible.

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