

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Fourth Bangkok Water Supply Project (II) and Fifth Project

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Relevance

Both projects undertaken here are timely and highly relevant to the needs of Bangkok Metropolitan Area (BMA) dwellers. Without these projects, serious problems would have occurred, resulting in shortages of water supply, insufficient water pressure, and poor water quality.

According to the view of a former member of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA), it is due in no small part to the foresight of MWA that these projects have been initiated at the right time. To many if not most Bangkok residents, BMA is today a highly liveable place, with vibrant city life styles and good quality of life for most of its 9 million plus population, thanks largely to the steady supply of good quality drinkable water available to most of its citizens at a price affordable by all. Certainly by this ultimate measure, these projects are evidently relevant to the development of Bangkok and its surrounding areas. The improvement in sanitation in BMA is clearly substantiated in the ex-post evaluation report.

Sustainability

As pointed out by a recent Thai-language article entitled "The Journey of Pipewater" (Manager Daily, 30 August 2005), the availability of good clean drinkable water supply at a reasonable price has been taken for granted for too long by BMA residents. Making inexpensive water supply available well into the future is a tricky problem that begs to be tackled at this juncture. The proper solution requires a careful balancing act by the policy planners. The case in point, as revealed by a water resource engineering expert is the public demonstrations in the 1990s by Mae Klong river basin farmers who feared that the diversion of water from their areas to the Maha Sawat Water Treatment Plant would have negative effects on farming there. A former governor of MWA points out that this fear proves to be uncalled for as the MWA only purchases no more than 800,000 m³ of Mae Klong River water per day from the Water Irrigation Department. This amount of diverted water is relatively insignificant and therefore has virtually no negative effect on farming. Nevertheless, this case points to the fragile give-and-take nature of water utilisation between the BMA and the provincial areas, which will need to be fairly addressed in future planning.

On top of this there are water loss problems, as pointed out in the ex-post evaluation report. Established waterworks authorities worldwide all have similar problems owing to water leakages commonly found in aging water distribution systems. However, as revealed by an engineer with practical field experience in overseeing trunk mains construction for the MWA, water theft is unfortunately rather widespread in BMA, especially in its outlying areas. This problem has so far been insufficiently addressed by MWA. A combination of IT and public education programs may be needed to reduce water theft to a minimum.

Finally, the pricing problem threatens to be a pressing issue for MWA as the cost of production is likely to become significantly higher upon its privatisation. This is due to the expected increase in land rents, when the present friendly public sector to public sector rates will likely be discontinued.

All these problems pose a serious challenge for MWA policy makers. Properly addressing them is a necessary condition to the sustainability and viability of the operation.