Special report 13/2012 (2011 discharge): European Union development assistance for drinking-water supply and basic sanitation in sub-Saharan countries

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PURPOSE: the drawing up of a Special Report (No 13/2012) of the Court of Auditors on European Union development assistance for drinking water supply and basic sanitation in sub-Saharan countries.

CONTENT: the European Union provides development assistance for water and sanitation throughout the world, including sub-Saharan Africa. Safe drinking water and sanitation improve health, and thus lead to faster economic growth and reduced poverty.

The ECA examined 23 projects in 6 sub-Saharan countries. The Court found that EU support had increased access to drinking water and basic sanitation, using standard technology and locally available materials. On the other hand, fewer than half of the projects examined satisfactorily met the beneficiaries' needs.

Moreover, for a majority of projects, results and benefits will not continue unless non-tariff revenue can be ensured.

In its audit, the Court revealed that there were problems affecting most of the project examined. In addition, it showed that the Commission was doing less than it might to maximise success and, in particular, to maximise the chances that projects will be sustainable – go on yielding benefits in the long term.

The Commission should apply its existing management procedures more rigorously, and give more attention to whether and **how projects can be expected to have access to the funding** they need to ensure that they go on helping to improve the life and health of people in the countries concerned.

Conclusions of the Court of Auditors' audit: the main findings are as follows:

- overall, equipment was installed as planned and was in working order;
- however, fewer than half of the projects examined delivered results meeting the beneficiaries' needs;
- overall, **the projects examined promoted the use of standard technology and locally-available materials: they were sustainable in technical terms**;
- for a majority of projects, results and benefits will not continue to flow in the medium and long term unless non-tariff revenue is ensured; or because of institutional weaknesses (weak capacity by operators to run the equipment installed);
- the Commission's project management procedures cover sustainability comprehensively; but the Commission did not make good use of those procedures to increase the likelihood that projects will bring lasting benefits.

Court's recommendations: the Court recommends that in a number of respects the Commission should make better use of its existing procedures, so as to maximise the benefits from EU development expenditure in this area and sector.