

Aquasan Position Paper

New knowledge and skills are essential for delivering quality water services

Association for Water and Environmental Protection "Aquasan Network in BiH" advocates capacity development and certification of operators in the water services sector.

Investments in communal infrastructure are necessary to ensure quality water supply and wastewater collection and treatment services. However, experience has shown that they must be accompanied by the enhancement of knowledge, skills and competencies of local government units (LGUs) responsible for organizing the water service delivery as well as of water service providers i.e. public utility companies (PUCs). Investors, financiers, engineers, but also citizens often insist on the construction of large and expensive water supply and sewerage systems, neglecting the importance of employees who manage these systems. Qualified and well-educated employees will ensure long-term maintenance of investments and, through the provision of quality services and sustainable performance, will contribute to the protection of environment and resources for future generations.

Although the situation in the water services sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) continues to demonstrate the need for improving operational efficiency and financial sustainability, which requires capable and competent staff and workforce, a system of planned training of employees and certification of water service operators has not been set yet. This is primarily because decision makers and management structures do not necessarily recognize the importance and benefits of capacity development, but also because investment in capacity development is not immediately visible as is the case with infrastructure investments. Another reason is the political influence on employment, which often creates a burden in terms of having incompetent professional staff, but also a large financial burden for PUCs, which, among other things, affects tariffs of water services.

Capacity development in the water services sector is a process by which appropriate technical, managerial

BENEFITS OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE WATER SERVICES SECTOR

- New knowledge, skills and experience in modern approaches, methodologies and work procedures that are applied in practice and thus improve performance;
- Creating own resources within a company / organization / institution as opposed to engaging external (often expensive) experts – greater independence;
- Ensures the development of sound programs and projects in line with requirements of financiers;
- Ensures the sustainability of infrastructure investments;
- Motivates employees who are accordingly more committed to their work and results thereof;
- Better image especially among international financial institutions and donors, but also image of attractive employer - today's generations want not only a salary but also the opportunity to learn and advance.

and financial knowledge, skills and capacities are acquired and maintained, thus enabling the provision of safe and sustainable water services to citizens. Capacity development is also a prerequisite for operator certification. It is a procedure through which an employee who has direct and "practical" responsibility for the production and distribution of drinking water as well as wastewater collection and treatment is trained,

evaluated and certified for meeting pre-set conditions and criteria. Certification implies the establishment of a system for assessing and verifying that an employee has the appropriate level of knowledge, education and experience to perform the assigned tasks and define opportunities for his/her professional development.

CERTIFICATION IS A MECHANISM TO:

- Ensure that the water services are delivered by qualified and competent staff;
- Minimize public health risks;
- Build trust of public in water services;
- Maximize performance;
- Protect the safety of the operator;
- Improve regulatory compliance;
- Optimize operating costs;
- Protect and adequately maintain infrastructure;
- Attract and retain competent engineers and technicians.

By establishing a certification system in the water services sector, service users will be increasingly confident that employees and operators are competent to provide citizens with quality water services and continuously trained on how to manage water service systems and identify and adequately respond to risks and incidents that may arise.

The certification is well known practice in the world, but also in our neighbourhood. The certification system was first established in the United States, while in Europe it is successfully implemented in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and many other European Union countries, and more recently in Albania.

Certification in the water services sector in BiH aims to protect public health, the environment and investment in the sector

In BiH, there are no regulations, standards and criteria to define a minimum level of competencies and capabilities required for operators in the water services sector. A number of LGUs and PUCs take responsibilities seriously and make efforts to educate and train their employees to keep up with everyday challenges and technological advances. However, training and other capacity development formats such as peer exchange, seminars, conferences, etc. are not always sufficient to meet specific requirements of a particular job. Aquasan Network in BiH therefore advocates for a certification system that will enable the systematic capacity development of employees in the water services sector.

Aquasan Network in BiH implements capacity development programs for PUCs, LGUs and relevant ministries, agencies and funds. These trainings are tailored to the identified needs of target groups such as improving knowledge and skills in the field of asset management, non-revenue water reduction, energy efficiency, better organization, provision and development of water services, improving the operation and maintenance of wastewater treatment plants, etc. These capacity development programs can be a good practice and the basis for the future certification process in BiH.



REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Mandate

The mandate arises from laws and regulations that require certification.

Institutional framework

The institutional framework includes:

- Certification Body – establishes the mandate of the program through laws,
- Certification Board – oversees certification process,
- Training Providers – prepare and conduct capacity development measures to prepare employees for taking certification exam,
- LGUs and PUCs – participate in certification program.

Procedures

Certification implies the establishment of procedures for verifying conditions regarding education and experience which must be grounded in legislation.