



Installing a new pipeline in Battuvani Palli from the low-fluoride source

approach to the implementation of existing rural water supply and watershed development programmes.

About the authors

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From our water correspondent

John Dada has won Waterlines' first 'Water correspondent' competition. In his dramatic submission from Nigeria we are reminded of the prevailing beliefs that block a scientific understanding of disease transmission and that impede the uptake of hygiene and sanitation.

Sewage, typhoid and witches

Titi's daughter is the fifth person in her household to come down with typhoid fever, but Titi is convinced that her family has been the target of the village witches. Incidentally Titi herself was recently discharged from hospital originally with the same problem. So I called her and told her that the village has only two kinds of witches at the moment: typhoid fever and malaria fever. And unless her family took the basic precaution of boiling their drinking water, they would not have seen the end of near-fatal hospital emergencies.

BayanLoco is a peri-urban squatter community that has no tarred roads, no piped water and no sewage disposal system in place. I suppose this village is really an average village, and anything I say about it could equally be said of millions of similar Nigerian villages.

The diagnostic laboratories have been doing brisk business in gauging antibody titres to typhoid bacteria. In a community that is endemic for typhoid, such titres are of course raised above average anyway – but who wants to know about these 'academic' objections. Chloramphenicol, most of it from the fake drug suppliers, is the standard prescription. And, if you cannot afford

the cost of a full five-day treatment of 500mg QDS, you just pay for what you can afford, and go and ask the pastor for some prayers to make up the balance. So the churches also have no shortage of members. If chloramphenicol cannot cure the fever, prayers and the casting out the witches and demons should do the rest.

Meanwhile the open sewers continue unchecked, and with the rains arriving, they are bursting at the seams. The Local Government Health Department has no resources to provide the most basic of public health care. The community are too impoverished and apathetic to be self-mobilized for self care. At any rate, they ask, what is the proof that these sewers have anything to do with the rampaging typhoid fever? Let's get rid of the witches first, then we can talk about the sewers later.

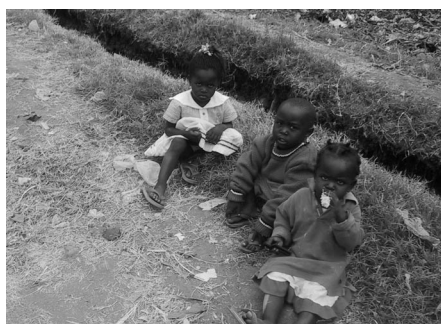
But all is not lost. Fantsuam Foundation is a local NGO based in the village and this organization is beginning to gain the trust of the people, and there is a growing willingness to engage in a community-led environmental sanitation. The NGO is also bringing in insecticide-treated mosquito nets that members can purchase using its microfinance loan facility.

How did I become a water and sanitation official? I am a full-time volunteer with Fantsuam Foundation, specializing in community health projects. Our microfinance service spans over 40 villages and it is on the back of this service that other programmes ride, such as health, education and ICT.

I have some training in public health and am able to talk with health officials and community leaders with some level of authority. I am leveraging these advantages to set up the BayanLoco Health Committee. We recently organized some health delivery services and the people have asked for more.

So maybe we are getting somewhere. Maybe soon, the witches of typhoid fever and malaria will be laid to rest, as we get the sewers properly channelled, and provide more mosquito nets for people, and encourage basic hygiene in the handling of food and drink.

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Children play next to an open wastewater drain. Credit: © 2003 Sammy Ndwiga, Courtesy of Photoshare