

## Editorial

THE THEME of this issue is private sector delivery of basic services. Before we define the term 'basic services', it would perhaps be useful to highlight the significance of equitable access in a just world. In an address to the Urban World Forum earlier this year, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon stated that 'All people have the right to safe drinking water, sanitation, shelter and basic services' (UN News March 22, 2010) – a reference to Article 21, Number 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#atop>).

This is not just a concern of the developing world. Several years ago, I spent time in a northern Canadian First Nations community with my young daughter. My doctor upbraided me on my return, telling me that there was a higher incidence of tuberculosis and other illnesses in these communities than anywhere in the world. (Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada, [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index-eng.asp](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index-eng.asp), reports that tuberculosis occurs eight to ten times more in First Nations communities than elsewhere in the country). This is not surprising when one considers the frequently cramped living quarters, outhouses backing onto the river, untreated drinking water drawn from the same river, and lack of regular health services. Similar stories are available from around the globe across the spectrum of developed, developing and least developed countries; for example, typical estimates are one billion people with inadequate access to water, and two and a half billion lacking basic sanitation.

But, what exactly are 'basic services'? The term is widely used in the realm of urban development where basic services are often discussed with respect to slums and physical services: water, solid waste management, sanitation, energy. However, access to basic services is a critical challenge in rural areas, and the term can be used to encompass all types of physical and social services that form the foundation of a minimum acceptable standard of living. In South Africa, for example, government policy declares that 'One of the key features of a developmental state is to ensure that all citizens – especially the poor and other vulnerable groups – have access to basic services: housing, education, health care, social welfare, transport, electricity and energy, water, sanitation, and refuse and waste removal' (<http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/government/basic.html>).

For this issue, we have chosen a broad definition of basic services – spanning urban and rural domains, as well as physical and social services – and we include papers that cover diverse topics from urban sanitation to early childhood education in remote rural communities.

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While recognizing the role of the public sector in basic services delivery, the articles herein illustrate the role of enterprise development practitioners and entrepreneurs in the face of unavailable, inadequate or failed public services. Indeed, commercial provision of affordable services is common in developing countries, meeting the needs of the underserved and responding to the absence of public services: for example, vendors who deliver water in jerry cans in slum areas in Uganda, or over a million 'sweepers' in India who empty dry latrines. In development, we frequently aim to upgrade these services while supporting the involvement of the public sector in maintaining standards, regulation and enforcement. Unfortunately, difficulties often arise when the public sector is not able to envisage appropriate levels of services that are affordable to poor communities, or is not ready to work with the community-based operators who provide such services. Often, development practitioners have a role in bringing these groups together. The four theme papers in this issue of *EDM* provide concrete examples and important insights into these and related concerns.

Along with our theme articles, Brian MacDonald offers an interesting new perspective on mission drift in microfinance institutions. Brian suggests that we should evaluate drift in terms of the mission of the agency providing services, and not as a top-down industry-defined mandate.

On another note, the editorial Committee is pleased to welcome Benjamin Fowler as a regular contributor to the journal. In the Webwatch section, Ben will be reporting on relevant discussions, opinion pieces and articles on the Internet. As an international consultant in microenterprise development, Ben brings expertise in microfinance and enterprise development to this task, and like Nicole, adds a fresh voice to the journal. Ben will be working with Susan Johnson, a Lecturer based in the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Bath. Susan is a long-term contributor to the journal as Book Reviews Editor and member of the Editorial Committee where she pushes us to be more rigorous particularly in terms of research and analysis. Check out this month's Webwatch for the latest on mobile banking!

We hope that this issue of the journal stimulates discussion, and we are always pleased to receive comments, feedback, advice and questions. If you would like to communicate directly with us, please do not hesitate to email either Nicole Pasricha, Assistant Editor or Linda Jones, Editor ([publishinginfo@practicalaction.org.uk](mailto:publishinginfo@practicalaction.org.uk)). And, please take a look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights whose URL is noted above – inspirational reading for those of us who have chosen to work in development!

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Editor