

Editorial

WATER AND SANITATION PROFESSIONALS are struggling to bring about large-scale and lasting beneficial change to the lives of the rural and urban poor. Some of those struggles are to do with the nature of the work in which we are engaged: the difficulty of changing behaviours and practices of those who could have most to gain by such changes; the varying competence and resources, and at times unhelpful competition (or at least lack of coordination) between agencies trying to bring about change; and the hugely challenging issues of population growth, urbanization and disease in the low- and middle-income countries. As I write this from Uganda, today's newspaper headlines concern outbreaks of cholera, Ebola virus, yellow fever and plague – all reported on a single day a mere seven years from the 2015 target date for the Millennium Development Goals.

It is common in our profession to refer to knowledge, attitudes and practice almost exclusively in relation to hygiene behaviour changes among households and communities. We would do well, however, to examine from time to time the same issues in relation to ourselves and our profession. Is our *knowledge* deep, rigorous, up to date and grounded in the reality of the experience of the poor? Are our individual and organizational *attitudes* conducive to bringing about lasting and beneficial change for the many or the few with whom we work? Are our ways of doing things as effective as they should be, being based on the widest possible exposure to good *practices* elsewhere?

It is to help to address these questions that *Waterlines* has changed its format and approach to documenting the sector. We wish to serve all those readers who want to develop an ever-greater professionalism and rigour, increased understanding, and above all more effective practical outcomes, both at a personal level and within their organizations. The practitioner focus of the journal and its concern to bring about real change 'on the ground' remain unchanged. But the journal will also be able to report more in-depth research findings than previously, without losing its field focus.

The first issue in the new format coincides with the International Year of Sanitation, a global attempt to highlight the importance and urgency of this crucial subject. What is well known is the massive scale of the problems associated with excreta disposal, solid waste management, wastewater treatment and disposal, and vector control – especially, but not exclusively in the rapidly growing peri-urban slums.

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© Practical Action Publishing, 2008, www.practicalactionpublishing.org
doi: 10.3362/1756-3488.2008.001, ISSN: 0262-8104 (print) 1756-3488 (online)

Waterlines Vol.27 No.1

January 2008

Joint Monitoring Programme statistics put the numbers of people not served with adequate excreta disposal (more than one in three of the global population) at more than twice the numbers not served with an improved water supply – and these figures take no account of the wider aspects of environmental sanitation just mentioned. It is also common knowledge that, despite our awareness of the scale of the problem, sanitation has been the poor relation to water supply, when it comes to resource allocations. Sadly, sanitation simply does not command the same political interest, and therefore spending priority, as water supply.

In this issue various authors address aspects of today's sanitation crisis, and suggest ways of approaching it constructively. Maggie Black takes a look back at the stench and filth of Victorian London, and explores the drivers of change brought about by a crisis which took place more than 100 years ago. Jamie Bartram and Andy Cotton discuss the Joint Monitoring Programme of the World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, and its ability to quantify the scale of the sanitation problem. Niall Boot examines the practical experience of the city of Accra, Ghana, in managing faecal sludge, from collection, through transport and temporary storage, to onward disposal and treatment. Kevin Tayler examines some of the institutional realities of urban sanitation, urging an incremental and pragmatic approach rather than 'grand narratives and ambitious projects'. Joanna Pearson and Kate McPhedran review the important non-health benefits of improved sanitation – the educational and social advantages of safe excreta disposal. Having recently returned from Malawi, where long-term awareness of the need for fertilizer or manure is coinciding with exciting achievements in promoting low-cost ecological sanitation options (see Peter Morgan's paper in the last issue), this topic, and also the economic impact of safe excreta disposal, is of special interest to me.

As we embark on this new phase in *Waterline's* contribution to the sector, and as we enter the International Year of Sanitation, the editorial team wishes all our readers renewed energy and determination as you play your part in bringing about better quality of life for the rural, urban and displaced poor.

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