

Editorial

ALMOST 1 BILLION PEOPLE in South Asia still live in the squalor resulting from inadequate or non-existent sanitation. In absolute numbers, this means that the region holds the greatest total of the sanitariously-unserved on the planet. For this reason, and in the International Year of Sanitation, this issue of *Waterlines* focuses on progress to date, and future challenges which must be addressed before South Asia can be declared truly faeces free.

South Asia may have the largest absolute numbers without adequate excreta disposal facilities, but sub-Saharan Africa is even worse off in percentage terms. Many of the issues which are raised in this edition of *Waterlines* are equally applicable in that region, and in other parts of the world where sanitation is less than perfect. So even if your interests do not lie in South Asia, do not look away now, or you may miss important matters that are applicable, with modification for culture and context, in your own region.

The event that has prompted this themed issue of *Waterlines* is the recent (January 2008) South Asian Sanitation and Hygiene Practitioners' Workshop, held in Dhaka, Bangladesh. James Wicken and Peter Ryan of WaterAid, and Joep Verhagen of IRC are to be thanked for their efforts in organizing this workshop, and calling together the first three of the articles in this edition of *Waterlines*. Christine Sijbesma's article summarizes that workshop by setting out 10 subject areas in which significant progress has been made, and another 10 in which considerably more work is needed. I will not repeat them all here, but highlighting a few which have wide geographic relevance may suffice to show the usefulness of the workshop.

Understanding the psychology of motivation is probably the single biggest issue surrounding sanitation, anywhere. We know now that convenience, dignity, privacy, status, disgust and sometimes economic gains carry more weight with all of us who defecate, than health and hygiene knowledge. Furthermore there are important differentiating motivators between men and women, rural and urban dwellers, and a number of other attributes of defecators.

As far as monitoring and (surrogate) measurement of impact is concerned, it is well known that the number of toilets is a far poorer indicator than the number of toilets which are used and kept clean and covered. An even better measure would be the combination of latrine usage with the absence of excreta in the environment. The latest 'silver bullet' in sanitation – so-called community-led total sanitation (CLTS), leading to open defecation-free (ODF) status – is a promising approach, but its sustainability (in the sense of on-going functionality over time) is not yet fully proven. Tapas Chakma et al. in their

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article comparing the impacts on health in reportedly ODF and non-ODF villages, find some encouraging results, but also some doubts over whether the behaviour change is long lasting.

A strong message of the workshop was that of choice. Choice over design and technology, cost, service level (shared vs. household; toilets, or toilets plus bathing and laundry facilities) and sourcing of hardware were all highlighted as important factors.

Farooq Khan and colleagues write about the reach that schoolchildren can have into the wider community, if they learn good hygiene through its practice in school. The stimulus that this can give to those same communities to find innovative solutions to their own sanitation problems is encouraging. In this paper, too, the importance of focusing on total sanitation, and open defecation-free status, rather than on the numbers game alone is emphasized.

The subject of sanitation seems to suffer from 's' words. Khan and colleagues write about the important topic of school sanitation, while Syed Qutub and others address the related matters of subsidy and sustainability in the urban context. Their paper describes a public-civil society partnership in Quetta, Pakistan, describing both positive outcomes and continued challenges for sustainability.

The subsidy 's' word is a major focus of the Crossfire debate in this issue of *Waterlines*. Is CLTS the sanitation 'fix' everyone is looking for, or has it yet to prove itself? Read the debate to learn more...

Now that we are more than half way through this International Year of Sanitation, I wonder whether today's global shit and squalor can be sent packing using sanitation strategies which focus on schools and slums (as well as rural areas and refugee camps), targeted subsidies, true sustainability, and the real psychology of demand? If there is even a glimmer of hope that we can clean up our world, then every effort to that end must be worthwhile. To echo Sir Richard Jolly's words a few years ago, let us neither be afraid to talk about shit, nor to put it in its proper, safe and ideally productive place.

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From our water correspondent – announcing a winner

Sharon Murinda, a Water and Sanitation Research Officer from Zimbabwe, has won our competition and will receive a £50 Practical Action Publishing book token and a year's subscription to *Waterlines*. Her winning entry on p. 248 describes the difficulties of running a hygiene campaign in a situation where meetings are often proscribed, activists are viewed with suspicion, and funds are short. Well done, Sharon!

Correction

In the April 2008 edition of *Waterlines*, three of the five articles (by Mulenga; Verhagen et al., and Dow Baker et al.) were papers adapted from versions submitted to the 33rd WEDC conference, 'Access to Sanitation and Safe Water: Global Partnerships and Local Actions', which took place in Accra, Ghana 7–11 April 2008. The editorial should have included acknowledgement and thanks to Julie Fisher and the staff of WEDC for their work in calling together these papers.