

Letters

Dear Editor,

Recently there has been a rapid spread of understanding and acceptance that subsidies to rural households for sanitation hardware are counterproductive and inhibit collective local action. This presents opportunities and challenges. The accelerating spread of Community-Led Total Sanitation, and of understanding what it entails, is hugely encouraging. We hope that its enormous potential for reducing poverty, enhancing human wellbeing, contributing to the MDGs, and leading to other collective actions, can be realized.

We are writing this open letter because in our view this potential will only be achieved if quality is maintained as CLTS goes to scale. We write in our personal capacities, basing what follows on past experience and current trends.

With PRA in the 1990s, rapid spread sponsored and demanded by donors, lenders and governments led to much bad practice. The label PRA was adopted in many places without the behaviour, attitudes and practices of good PRA. Demand for trainers far exceeded the number of good trainers available. The

gap was met mainly by consultants, NGOs and groups who were not competent and did harm. We are concerned that the same should not occur with CLTS. Unfortunately, there are indications that it has already begun. In our considered view, to prevent this and to maintain and enhance quality, three critical aspects deserve special attention: focus and restraint in funding; good CLTS training that is hands-on; and effective follow up after triggering.

- *For focus and restraint in funding*, we urge donors, lenders and governments to avoid programmes driven by big budgets, targets and pressures to disburse, and instead to go to scale in a steady manner, focusing on good training and building up and supporting a cadre of dedicated and committed staff and local-level natural leaders. Much damage has been done by pushing too much money too fast at NGOs. Enough funding is needed but not too much.
- *For hands-on training*, identifying good trainers is the key, and then supporting them to become full time,

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Kamal Kar is an independent consultant in social and participatory development and Visiting Fellow with the Knowledge, Technology and Society Team of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex. Professor Robert Chambers is a Research Associate of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, UK.

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with all training hands-on with communities. Some of the best people are tied down by other jobs. Wherever possible, they should be allowed to be full-time on CLTS. Deterioration of training quality due to fast scaling up has started in some places. It is vital that the quality of training be monitored and no organisations or individuals recruited who lack the experience, attitudes and behaviours that are essential.

- *For follow up*, triggering should never be a one-off event but the start of a continuous process of encouragement and support leading to communities becoming sustainably free from open defecation, and empowered and inspired to go further.

These and other aspects of CLTS will be covered in a *Handbook for Implementing CLTS* forthcoming from Plan UK and the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK.

This is a critical time in the history of CLTS. If all those concerned ensure these three actions, the future should be bright indeed. And if they do not, a huge opportunity for gains for rural people will have been tragically missed. We appeal to whoever can influence events not to let this happen.

Yours sincerely,

Kamal Kar,
R109 The Residency,
City Centre, Salt Lake,
Kolkata 700 064, India
Robert Chambers
Nataruk, Ashcombe Lane Kings-
ton, Lewes, UK