

Reviews and resources

Human Excreta Index

2005, WASTE, the Netherlands, www.thehumanexcretaindex.com

€25; to order this DVD send an email to: office@waste.nl

Within the world of sanitation, there is ongoing controversy about ecological sanitation (commonly known as ecosan), which is a form of sanitation that separates urine from faeces at source and reuses excreta to increase crop yields. There are obvious benefits related to the increased food production and livelihood support, but there is an ongoing debate about its wide-scale viability. Sceptics argue that ecosan requires too much external finance to subsidize capital investment and project costs to promote ecosan. There are also issues related to the behavioural aspects of ecosan latrines and major socio-cultural constraints related to handing of excreta for reuse that have to be overcome if ecosan is to be a success.

These concerns are valid but on the other hand there are also many misconceptions about ecosan, which the producers of this film (WASTE) try to address in a documentary of the experiences of ecosan from seven countries around the world.

These are used to exemplify success stories, but the constraints are also recognized. Some of the examples come from countries which are well known for their ecosan projects – others are less well known. The aim is to promote ecological sanitation as a means to tackle sanitation problems in a wide variety of contexts.

The documentary starts with a reminder from Diepsloot, near Johannesburg, of the deficiencies of sanitation facilities and arrangements for excreta management in many squatter camps and low-income informal settlements that are prevalent throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Interviews with local residents highlight the problems that they face. Although health is evidently an issue, it is apparent that many concerns are more related to inconvenience, lack of servicing and unpleasant smells.

Staying in South Africa, the film moves on to show one of the biggest and most well-known ecosan programmes currently being implemented by Durban Metro City Municipality. A large-scale urine diversion toilet project is demonstrated in peri-urban Durban which aims to cover 70,000 households by 2010. Although the film highlights the benefits, the examples

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© Practical Action Publishing, 2009, www.practicalactionpublishing.org
doi: 10.3362/1756-3488.2009.019, ISSN: 0262-8104 (print) 1756-3488 (online)

April 2009

Waterlines Vol. 28 No. 2

from Durban also emphasize the fact that intensive promotion and training is required for this new technology. Not mentioned in the film is the fact that excreta are not reused in Durban, which of course detracts from the potential soil conditioning benefits of the system. Another example from South Africa shows the Mvula Trust Ecosan project near Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, which highlights the benefits of promoting ecosan related to the fact that toilets can be incorporated inside the house. This example brings home the message that an ecosan latrine in the home does not smell and provides a safe, private place for defecation which is especially convenient for women.

Jumping to Kampala, the Ugandan Minister of Water presents a strong case for ecosan, interesting insofar as the Minister does not mention any examples of ecosan except for the one in her own house. However, Uganda is well known for ecosan initiatives and the principal engineer and senior health inspector from Kampala City Council describes an ecosan project in an inner city slum. Another example is from a school which highlights that children may be much more adaptable to the idiosyncrasies of ecosan than their elders give them credit for.

A public toilet facility in Bangalore provides another example of ecosan in an urban slum from which excreta are used as

fertilizer for a banana plantation. At first the local community did not express much of an interest in ecosan, but the film recounts how they adapted to the use of three different apertures: one for anal washing water, one for faeces and one for urine. Faeces are transported offsite into drums with lids and then composted. However, the fact that the anal wash water is collected in oil drums which are manually carried away for off-site disposal is apparently one reason why this example has received both national and international criticism.

In a low-income resettlement area in Lima, Peru, urine diversion toilets have been installed by a local NGO and the grey water and urine is used for growing alfalfa as fodder for rabbits which provide a valuable source of nutrition. Although nutrient reuse is often emphasized by advocates of ecosan, it is interesting to note that this example provides a stronger case for the local livelihood benefits that may be achieved.

China provides an example where ecosan has been implemented at scale. More than 1 million ecosan toilets have been installed by the Guangxi Government. Uno Winblad, the godfather of ecosan, describes the story and the interviewees recount how the ecosan latrines are attractive, especially for women, due to lack of smell and flies. The film ends with an example from Sweden, the

home country of Uno Winbad and also SIDA who are keen advocates of ecosan, where the Nacka Greenhouse Project provides a sustainable approach towards water and nutrient management.

On the whole, the film takes a pragmatic viewpoint and provides a realistic portrayal and reasonably balanced view of ecosan. It is refreshing and enlightening to see some film footage of different ecosan initiatives as there is already plenty that has been written about these projects. It is interesting, not simply from an ecosan perspective, but because it portrays real issues related to sanitation facilities (or the lack of) that are of concern to residents living in low-income communities in different parts of the world. Although the DVD refers to the ecological benefits associated with excreta reuse, the DVD doesn't labour the point and in fact emphasizes more the fact that ecosan latrines don't smell and are easier to keep clean without the use of water.

The DVD is a useful advocacy tool to enable policy makers to see the potential benefits of ecosan without having to go anywhere near a latrine! It is also of definite interest to sanitation practitioners, many of whom like myself have not had the opportunity to see the wide range of different applications of ecosan in different parts of the world, and lecturers who want to be able to show to their

students what ecological sanitation means in practice. The film may not totally convert the most ardent sceptics but certainly for the more open-minded it will make one see the benefits that ecosan offers.

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One Fly is Deadlier than 100 Tigers: Total sanitation as a business and community action in Bangladesh and elsewhere

Heierli, U. and Frias, J.
2008, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).
Berne, Switzerland, 112 pp + CD-ROM, downloadable from <http://www.poverty.ch/>.
Part of the Poverty Alleviation as a Business Series.

The International Year of Sanitation (IYS), 2008, saw a flurry of activity in a previously neglected sector. Now that year is over sanitation risks once again falling off the political agenda. Thankfully numerous useful sanitation publications were published in the IYS allowing future sanitation programmers to at least access a huge wealth of knowledge previously held only in people's heads. *One Fly is Deadlier than 100 Tigers* represents Heierli and Frias's attempt to share with the world the worth and promise of demand-centred and market-based approaches to sanitation promotion.

Key strengths of the publication are the inclusion of country



case examples (primarily from Bangladesh, but also India, Ethiopia, Switzerland and Vietnam) and its attempt to move beyond theory to offer technical guidance through the provision of four chapters of methodological support.

The greatest strength of the document however is its persistent recognition of the importance of not just generating household and community demand for sanitation but recognizing and developing the role of the private sector to deliver appropriate products and services. This is something that has hitherto been missed in documentation of and guidance to the increasingly popular community-led total sanitation (CLTS) approach which focuses on driving demand through the generation of disgust, shame and social pressure.

One Fly is Deadlier than 100 Tigers is split into two parts, the first presenting the theory behind 'Achieving Total Sanitation through Market Development and Social Pressure: the 5Ps of Marketing' and the second 'Methodological Support' section giving more in-depth explanation of key terms and steps in programme development as well as a providing a selection of tools for use in programme design and community mobilization. The accompanying DVD in the back cover provides short video examples to bring the discussed concepts and approaches to life.

However while demonstrating clear strengths, *One Fly is Deadlier than 100 Tigers* also has its weaknesses, which mostly result from a lack of clarity with regard to the meaning of the term 'total sanitation', definition of the target audience and the book's purpose, and finally its attempt to perhaps cover too many bases in a single document.

In particular this publication, while going into more detail and giving more guidance than a simple introductory guide aimed at policy makers and programme managers, fails to provide enough insight or support to qualify as an implementation guide. In particular, readers miss a simple graphical representation of the key steps involved in following this approach and/or easy cross-referencing between the different sections of the guide. Further, while the book includes many tools, already available in Kamal Kar and Robert Chambers's *Handbook on Community-led Total Sanitation*, others are conspicuously absent: namely sufficiently in-depth guidance on developing the sanitation market (that is, creating the appropriate product range, and developing supply chains and provider business and promotion skills).

In short, the key (and very important) strength of this guide is its recognition of the need not just to generate demand for sanitation, but to develop supply chains in order to effectively

meet this demand. However, while it recognizes this, it fails to offer sufficient programmatic support to enable sanitation programme managers to rise to this challenge. Perhaps a better route to combining CLTS and a market-based approach to drive sanitation is to utilize a combination of the *Handbook*

on Community-led Total Sanitation and the highly informative first publication in the 'Poverty Alleviation as a Business' Series: *Poverty Alleviation as a Business: The Market Creation Approach to Development*.

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