

Reviews and resources

The Big Necessity: Adventures in the World of Human Waste

Rose George
2008, Portobello Books, 326 pages, £12.99, ISBN: 978 21 84627 069 7

What a book! What a really good book! Rose George writes very well and she knows how to tell a good story – in this case a good story about human excreta. Even if you're pretty expert on sanitation, you'll find this a fascinating read; and, if you're not, it'll inspire you to learn more about this hideously important subject. For hideously important it is, with around 2.5 billion people without 'improved' sanitation, and probably at least a billion more without 'adequate' sanitation. These huge numbers include a staggering 1.2 billion with no sanitation whatsoever. These are the 'open defecators', and 56 per cent of them live in just one country – India; that's 58 per cent of the whole Indian population. You won't read about 'improved' versus 'adequate' sanitation here, but there's a gem of a chapter called 'Open Defecation Free India: Husband wanted, must have toilet'. Nor will you read too much about costs (too distracting, perhaps), but in the pages on ecological

sanitation Pete Kolsky is quoted as saying 'if I can't convince a household to invest \$50 in a basic cement slab and a pit, what on earth makes you think I'm going to convince them to invest \$300 in an eco-san toilet?' Quite!

You won't find much, if anything, on design, but that's not the point of the book. This is a book that inspires, a book that cajoles you into more sensible thinking about something we may not like but which we all produce: shit. Gandhi said that sanitation was more important than independence, and he was right (not that India has done brilliantly well since 1948, or 58 per cent of its people wouldn't be shitting in the open). The world needs to change its attitude to sanitation, and you can argue that this is beginning to happen now. But most politicians in developing countries (and it's in these countries that the main sanitation crisis exists) still need to realize that it's actually immoral to allow so many of their citizens to die because they have no toilet, because (to use the words of the late Barbara Ward) they 'defecate themselves to death'. This book, this wonderful book, can help change minds and, if it does, then Rose George can be very proud of it.

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Sanitation, and the 2.5 billion people who need it, needs many more advocates like her.

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Sanitation for Primary schools in Africa

Bob Reed and Rod Shaw
(illustrations by Ken Chatterton)
2008, WEDC, Loughborough University, UK, 58 pages, £24.95, ISBN: 978-1-84380-127-6

When I was asked to write a review of this book and had a glance at it, I did not know what to think, as it is something quite different from other WASH in schools literature. However after taking some time, I found myself going through it quite easily.

This book gives the reader a clear idea on what issues need to be considered when reflecting on improving sanitation facilities in the school premises. It takes a very practical view of the issues that need to be dealt with, starting from tools for assessing sanitation, water and handwashing in schools to guidelines for rehabilitating and decommissioning existing latrines. Currently in the literature for WASH in schools, there are lots of 'pieces' of material on the construction aspect of facilities especially at district and state-level ministries around the world. However there is very little information on this at global level (and even at national level there is not that much out there). In this manner, this book does provide a breath

of fresh air for readers interested to know more about WASH in schools from the 'hardware' side.

Having stated this, however, it should also be mentioned that this book does not really give a 'balanced' picture of WASH in schools. I will not argue that the guidelines for rehabilitating latrines, choosing the right type of latrine, siting school latrines, the O&M of facilities and the key aspect of handwashing with soap is not important. It definitely is! However an additional chapter(s) on other critical aspects of WASH in schools, such as planning, coordination and management in the schools, connecting with the community and monitoring for implementation would have been useful. Other 'software' aspects such as life skills-based hygiene education would be of interest. Points such as the development of district programmes (as schools are not isolated blocks but form part of a whole network of schools at (sub)district, state and national level) would have been a useful addition. In addition a focus on sustaining and potential for scaling up WASH in schools could also have provided useful information for the reader.

Inevitably, however, every publication has to limit its focus area and this is the case with this book. However, *if* a second edition were to be published I would strongly suggest it be done with another institute that

focuses more on the 'software' aspects of WASH in schools, not just the 'hardware' issues. However, if this is not possible, then at least a useful, 'balanced' reference list could be included so that readers can find additional material and websites. Finally, I should state that this book does add to the existing WASH in schools literature and as such is a useful reference.

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Household Water Treatment and Safe Storage in Emergencies: A Field Manual for Red Cross/Red Crescent Personnel and Volunteers

IFRC
2008

This handbook, produced by the IFRC as general guidance for field personnel and volunteers on household water treatment and safe storage (HWTS), begins with an overview of water quality and HWTS; continues with a review of the main HWTS methods of disinfection, sedimentation, filtration, and safe storage; and concludes with a decision tree responders can use to: 1) determine if HWTS use is indicated; and, if so, 2) which options (using locally available and/or commercial products) are appropriate for their particular emergency situation. Sample training materials are also included. A key message throughout the manual is that 'no distribution of household

water treatment products without training' should occur, and responders are encouraged to try the products themselves before recommending them to affected populations.

This handbook has been released during interesting times. Within the peer-reviewed literature and academic communities, there is currently significant debate on the relative role of water supply, sanitation, hygiene and household water treatment in developing countries. Some researchers are questioning, owing to lack of blinded field trials and non-health benefits, whether HWTS should be widely implemented, despite overwhelming evidence that HWTS use reduces diarrhoeal disease. Rather than enter an academic debate, this handbook starts with a more practical approach, stating that:

It is always better to use water from a clean source that's stored in a safe way. However, this is not always possible, especially in an emergency. Something may have made the source unclean or unusable. Or a population may not have access to clean containers or practice good hygiene behaviour. One approach to this problem is treating water at the household level. This is often a temporary measure undertaken until the water source can be improved.

As evidenced by the above quotation, one strength of this handbook is its lay-person style: the handbook avoids jargon, is simply and effectively illus-

trated, and presents a clear and technologically sound overview of HWTS. A non-WATSAN responder could, in a few short hours, read this handbook, make a decision on which (if any) HWTS option(s) to promote in their situation, and have basic training materials prepared. This handbook is most useful for emergency responders who are: 1) working within situations where provision of clean water and/or safe storage of water is not feasible and thus have determined that HWTS is an appropriate strategy; and 2) need assistance determining which of the myriad commercial and non-commercial HWTS options are appropriate for their particular circumstance. A small oversight in the decision tree of not including boiling as one option for when the source water is contaminated and muddy (boiling was included when source water is contaminated, but not muddy) can be corrected in the next edition. This

handbook is not as valuable for responders seeking a more technical, research-orientated document, and the experienced reader is referred instead to the Oxfam Technical Brief on HWTS in emergencies at http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/humanitarian/downloads/TBN4_household_water_treatment_storage.pdf.

The IFRC should be commended for developing this simple, effective, broadly needed document that is widely applicable for organizations considering implementing HWTS in emergencies and making it freely available at www.ifrc.org/Docs/pubs/disasters/resources/responding-disasters/142100-hwt-en.pdf (English). French and Spanish versions are available at the same link, ending with 142100-hwt-fr.pdf and 142100-hwt-sp.pdf, respectively.

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