

Editorial

ALTHOUGH THE PAPERS in this issue of *Waterlines* are not built around a common theme, there is a strong common thread running through them. This common thread is about 'doing better', about putting in place those elements which are more likely to lead to sustainable, high quality services for all. The papers and other resources in this issue cannot and do not cover the entire ground, but they do afford glimpses and insights which we hope will provide food for thought.

Doing well in the WASH sector involves (at least) the following aspects: (a) determining and where necessary reinforcing the demand of all service users for better water and sanitation services; (b) designing interventions in such a way as to maximize the likelihood that local management will be effective; (c) involving from the outset those organizations which will support system management; (d) ensuring financial viability over the long term; (e) designing the support mechanisms needed for the chosen management option; and (f) establishing and implementing policies which reflect realities on the ground.

Underlying demand for improved sanitation and water supply services is strong. However, the extent to which it is articulated at a household and community level, and the extent to which it is reflected in a willingness and ability to pay, vary a great deal. Often it is necessary to unlock a latent demand, so translating an underlying desire for something better into individual or communal action to achieve that better service. The success of Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) lies in its ability to unlock that potential, and turn it into practical, self-help action. CLTS has its critics, and it may not be applicable in its 'pure' form everywhere. However its ability to mobilize whole communities and deliver outcomes which other approaches have failed to achieve makes it worthy of careful consideration, study and application. Peter Harvey's paper from experience in Zambia takes this further.

Community management is appropriate for basic water supply systems, despite its inherent weaknesses. However it does not happen automatically, and it is not without its challenges. As Julian Yates describes in relation to experiences in Nepal, when conflicts arise within or between communities, strong local institutions are needed. That strength lies in their ability to represent the people they serve, and their responsiveness in particular times of need. Community management can be undermined by poor selection or design of technology, so the 'appropriateness' of technology is inseparable from the ability of the chosen management arrangements to handle it. Valerie Fuchs and James Mihelcic explore this aspect in Bolivia.

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There is an increasing body of evidence that a wide range of local management arrangements for WASH services require technical, institutional, financial and other forms of support from external public or private sector organizations. For those support organizations to become engaged, they need to be involved from the outset of planning and implementation. The support needed to local management arrangements includes not only those just mentioned, but also monitoring and trouble-shooting, regulation and supply chain support. Some of the external support functions needed can only be carried out by central government. The coordination of viable internal management arrangements and appropriate external support drives effective and sustainable service delivery. This is explored further in Murray's and Drechsel's paper on wastewater treatment plant management in Ghana, particularly in relation to O&M strategies, financing schemes and incentive structures.

National WASH policies, strategies and sector investment plans need to reflect the local realities of need and demand, ability and willingness to pay, the limits of local management capacities and a wide range of other factors. The implications of different policy options for social outcomes such as equity and health, natural resource protection and conservation, economic growth, and many other desirable changes need to be explored and understood. Rory Padfield's paper investigates some of these issues, particularly those around equity of service provision, with reference to Zambia.

So where does all this leave us? In simple terms, strong demand for services, combined with well-designed management and recurrent financing arrangements and appropriate external support, all carried out in a supportive policy environment, provides a recipe for sustainable service delivery. And surely it is this – services which once established continue indefinitely to provide benefits to all – which constitutes 'doing better' in the WASH sector.

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Waterlines' WASH Competition – copy deadline 1 June 2011

Waterlines journal is celebrating 30 years of publication, and we invite you to enter our competition. Please write 500–1000 words on:

- what you consider to be the greatest development in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector in the last 30 years and why, or
- what is the greatest threat or challenge affecting our sector in the next 10 years, or
- who do you consider to be a great hero in our sector in the last 30 years – and how have they made a difference?

Submissions should go to Clare.tawney@practicalaction.org.uk or to suecavill@hotmail.com. The winning entry will receive £100 worth of books from Practical Action Publishing's Development Bookshop (<http://development-bookshop.com/>) and a *Waterlines* subscription, and all the best entries will be published in the October 2011 edition of *Waterlines*.