

Editorial

WE LIVE IN A PARADOXICAL and complex world. In the low-income countries, populations are growing fast, but often population densities are still too low to support vibrant markets and to stimulate rapid change in infrastructure, livelihoods, and employment. Many countries are urbanizing fast, while the majority of their populations still live in rural areas. Water supply coverage levels are higher among the minority urban populations of low-income countries than for the majority rural people. At the same time old simplifications are changing as, for example, the boundaries between 'rural' and 'urban' become increasingly blurred. Nevertheless, as the most recent JMP (Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation) report reminds us, five in every six people without an improved water supply are classed as rural.

There are strong arguments for redressing imbalances in WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) service coverage. Those yet to be served, on account of their geographic remoteness and invisibility to the service providers, or their non-sedentary lifestyle, or because of age, disability, chronic illness, or stigma, cry out to be included in the benefits of water and sanitation services. Whether one is persuaded by human rights arguments, simple justice and equity considerations, the imperatives of public good, or the logic of the market, the aspiration is clear – services should be enjoyed by all.

The second clear principle which is increasingly prominent in the provision of WASH services is that of sustainability. A service which works today and is gone tomorrow is no service at all. We are increasingly recognizing that despite the undoubted progress in raising coverage levels, too much of the investment in services is wasted because it fails to last. As I have argued before in these editorials and elsewhere, the only worthwhile ambition around sustainability is that once the water starts to flow, it should never dry up.

So we arrive at two principles which can be summed up in a simple phrase: 'for all, for good'. Or as Water for People express it, even more succinctly, 'everyone forever'. Surely no water or sanitation professional can disagree with this expression of the goal of our work.

I will digress briefly to make what I believe is a crucial point – one which merits much lengthier consideration than is possible here. The point is the intimate inter-connection between the goal of equity (fairness) and inclusion ('for all') and that of sustainability ('for good'). Put simply, if we fail to achieve sustainability in service provision, then we will fail in the goal of inclusion. Those who once

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were 'haves' will become 'have-nots'. Similarly, were we to focus only on serving the hardest-to-serve, we would pass up many possibilities of economy of scale, cross-subsidy, and market development. Serving all must mean exactly that – serving rich and poor, urban and rural, those already with a supply, and those who have not yet been reached.

This issue of *Waterlines* has been drawn together on the theme of rural water supply. It reflects some recent activities of the Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) and of rural water professionals who report on work in a number of countries in east and southern Africa, spanning a wide range of technologies and rural contexts. RWSN is a global knowledge and practice network open to all rural water professionals, with a small secretariat in Switzerland and a large membership globally.

Kerstin Danert reports from the Secretariat on some of the key initiatives and activities of RWSN, including the 6th RWSN Forum in Kampala in November 2011, leadership of the rural water theme at the World Water Forum in Marseille in March 2012, and recent engagement in dialogue over the human right to water, and how that might play out in practice. A number of opportunities are presented for your participation in current debates, and in changes you might adopt in your own work.

We then have three diverse papers from Uganda (Jacinta Nekesa and Rashidah Kulanyi), Madagascar (Jonathan Annis and Gerald Razafinjato), and Namibia (Erla Hlín Hjálmarsdóttir), all with a strong theme of operation and maintenance/sustainable service. It is clear that whether we are dealing with hand pumps, piped water supplies or solar photovoltaic pumping technology, the key issue is that of keeping the service working.

An interesting contribution from Kenya (Jonathan Mellor, David Watkins, and James Mihelcic) revisits the question of the relationship between water consumption and water access. In rural locations water is carried over varying distances, and the desirability of increasing consumption beyond survival levels to allow for better personal and home hygiene is potentially undermined by the disincentive of distance and effort. The results reported in this paper are however rather unexpected and surprising.

Finally, our focus on the supply of water gives way to consideration of the passing of water in a paper on urinals in Kenyan schools, and the role they can play in reducing congestion and widening access to school sanitation. The authors (Matthew Freeman, Marielle Snel, Mohamed El-Fatih Yousif, Samuel Gitau, Farooq Khan, Samuel Wachira and Ingeborg Krukkert) conclude that careful consideration of the actual needs of boys and girls can lead to equitable and inclusive solutions.

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