

Editorial

THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE is on monitoring and mapping of water and sanitation services. It is therefore concerned with transitions – the change from one (inferior) situation to another, better one. Not all these transitions have yet been achieved, but the contributions in this issue point the way to a better future, and how that progression can be monitored.

The first transition, which is the main focus of several papers, is from ignorance to knowledge. The oft-repeated saying is that ‘what you don’t measure (or monitor), you can’t manage’. If governments, NGOs and donors do not know the location of the infrastructure which they or the users of WASH services have installed; if they do not know who and how many people use the services; and if there is ignorance about the condition of assets and services, then what hope can there be that such services are well managed and providing lasting impact? It may seem relatively simple to establish inventories of assets, user registers, and monitoring arrangements in order to turn ignorance into knowledge, but the reality is far from straightforward. Responsible organizations lack incentives and resources, and even service users may not consider it worthwhile to report deteriorating or broken-down services – assuming there is someone to report to in the first place. The latter point is well made by Patrick Thomson, Rob Hope and Tim Foster in their paper on mobile phone-based monitoring technologies.

In the past, remoteness of communities, and lack of transport and other resources meant it was not easy to construct inventories of assets, to display them visually in maps and photographs marked with date and place, and to report faults. But times change, and technology offers opportunities to do things in new ways. The second transition we are seeing now is from a situation in which some monitoring and mapping tasks were simply too difficult, to one in which the tools for such tasks are becoming readily and freely available. The *Note from the field* by Elisa Roma, Joseph Pearce, Chris Brown and Sirajul Islam highlights a number of mapping tools.

But if measurement or monitoring is a necessary pre-condition for effective management, it is not a sufficient one. A number of countries have comprehensively mapped their water points, and the technology exists to map sanitation services too. Numerous monitoring and mapping systems exist, but the key issue is not so much about which system to use, but rather how to institutionalize the chosen system

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– to make it so much a part of the way governments and other service providers do their work that it becomes routine. Data has value only if it is up to date and accurate, so resources and procedures to permit regular and frequent updating and quality assurance need to be in place. The third transition is therefore from one-off mapping to routine updating, as Owen Scott points out in his paper from Malawi. Both actual and potential changes to the practices of institutions can be realized, as Emily Christensen Rand, Crispin Wilson and Jessica Mercer show in their paper from Timor-Leste.

Much of the focus of water and sanitation development over the past few decades has been on capital investment, on spending to bring services to the hitherto unserved. Far less has been invested in keeping services working. In relation to monitoring and mapping, investment has gone into the technology and first use, but far less into the institutionalization of monitoring systems. Advocacy and campaigning around investment has tended to focus on more, rather than better-targeted and more effectively used financing. This, however, is changing too. The fourth transition is from more to better investment. Kate Fogelberg's letter from Honduras gives hope here.

People who have never known or enjoyed adequate water and sanitation services can be forgiven for acquiescing in such a situation, even when efforts have been made by governments and others to improve their lot. But until users' desire, demand, and motivation to change are sufficiently strong, little will change. The success of initiatives such as community-led total sanitation and sanitation marketing, accelerated self-supply (of water) and community health clubs shows that sufficient demand can be released to result in even very poor people investing in their own change and development. This fifth transition is all about the articulation of latent demand for change. Willingness to pay is part of the evidence for that demand, and even though it is notoriously difficult to gauge, Elizabeth Morris and Thanh-Tam Thi Le have made a brave attempt in their paper from Peru.

The sixth change which all contributors to this journal and all its readers desire and work for is the transition from no access to sustainable service. The paper by David Sparkman, the *Note from the field* by St John Day in Sierra Leone, and the *Crossfire* debate between Clarissa Brocklehurst and Ned Breslin all help point the way to how targets may be set to achieve such a transition in the years running up to and beyond 2015.

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