

Webwatch

In this Webwatch, we look at the issue of evidence in the WASH sector, catch up with debates about sector monitoring, and highlight new online courses and tools of interest to sector professionals.

Debates on evidence and monitoring in the WASH sector

DFID WASH Evidence Review

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-evidence-paper>

The latest Evidence Paper on WASH published by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) assesses three areas: the evidence for impacts on health and other benefits, the evidence on different WASH delivery options, and the evidence on cost-effectiveness and value for money. Key gaps in evidence include the role of different excreta-related disease transmission pathways and the relative effectiveness of sanitation interventions on health, the long-term non-health impacts associated with poor WASH, how to reach vulnerable populations, behaviour change for sanitation and hygiene at scale, and costs and cost-effectiveness in different contexts.

The tricky business of what is considered 'evidence' in WASH

www.source.irc.nl/page/79234

Catarina Fonseca, Director of the WASHCost project at the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, responds to DFID's Evidence Review, arguing that evidence should not just include work published in academic journals. Evidence from research by donors, NGOs and governments that is backed up by good research methodologies is valuable too, especially concerning the issues of costs and sustainability.

Final thoughts on The Great Evidence Debate

www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=13590

These discussions on evidence in WASH are reflected by wider debates in the aid and development sector. Duncan Green, Strategic Adviser at Oxfam GB, hosted a debate on his blog between two sides of the argument: senior officials at DFID pushing for more 'evidence-based policy' and the use of techniques such as randomized controlled trials versus academics arguing that evidence is always political and that current trends try to impose narrow quantitative measurement on a complex world. Green provides a balanced summary of the two points of view and some ideas to take forward. Although some of these points sound obvious, I have been to

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a number of recent events where the two sides of the argument talk past each other, so it is a good reminder to all of us to remember the assumptions we make in our own work about what we base our decision-making on.

IRC Symposium 2013: Monitoring sustainable WASH service delivery

www.irc.nl/page/72969

The recent IRC Symposium in Addis Ababa focused on monitoring sustainable WASH services, linking to the debates about evidence by discussing the practical challenges of how different actors can get the information they need to improve their work. I was disappointed to miss the event myself, having found the previous IRC Symposium in 2011 very engaging and useful. However, the conference website includes all the papers and presentations, as well as related blogs, videos and opinions from participants. A good example of how events such as this reach a wider audience beyond only those who can attend in person.

New free online WASH courses

A number of new free online courses for WASH professionals have been launched recently, which build on long experience with distance learning in the sector as well as ideas from the trend of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) from outside the sector.

Rural Sanitation at Scale – WEDC and WSP online course

<https://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/my-courses/rss.html>

The Water and Engineering Development Centre (WEDC) at Loughborough University and the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) of the World Bank have produced a free online course, Rural Sanitation at Scale. WEDC has long experience as a provider of distance learning and masters programmes. This short course is a unit in the MSc programme Management of Water and Sanitation, but is now being offered as a separate non-accredited unit to make it more widely available to WASH professionals. The course is delivered through a variety of media including presentations, video clips and written materials available online. The three parts of the course cover the context to the challenge of scaling-up rural sanitation and the three 'pillars' of change: demand creation, the supply chain, and the enabling environment. Each part takes about one hour of study, plus additional reading required.

Costing Sustainable Services – IRC WASHCost online course

www.irc.nl/page/76854

The Costing Sustainable Services online course has been developed by the WASHCost project of the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre for WASH sector professionals. The course aims to assist governments, NGOs, donors and

individuals to plan and budget for sustainable and equitable WASH services, using a life-cycle cost approach. Every other month 150 participants can start the course by registering online. The remaining start dates in 2013 are 5 August, 7 October and 2 December. Participants work through the modules and exercises at their own pace with the help of the course material. Online help is available from IRC staff and other students through an online forum, and staff aim to respond to questions within 48 hours. Students also receive a certificate if they successfully complete a test at the end of each module. Although this course is not yet 'massive' in the same way as the Massive Online Open Courses discussed next, it shares many of the same features and hopefully can reach hundreds of participants around the world.

Discussion of Massive Online Open Courses for sanitation – SuSanA forum

<http://forum.susana.org/forum/categories/54-wg-1-cap-development/4638-concept-of-massive-open-online-courses-for-susana-and-its-members-a-users>

The Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA) has started a discussion about how Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) could be developed for the sanitation sector. MOOCs are a wave of free online courses being pioneered by universities around the world to enable them to educate thousands of students who cannot attend in person. The initial courses offered were often science subjects, but providers such as Coursera, Udacity, EdX and many others now offer courses in a wide range of disciplines. These typically add two key features to more traditional distance learning: automated feedback to the learner through online quizzes and exams, and peer-learning through discussion boards and group collaboration. This is how MOOCs address the challenge of high student-to-teacher ratios. Most MOOCs so far are not for academic credit. One idea to help finance MOOCs in the long term (instead of being run at a loss by universities) is to keep the courses free, but to charge students for taking the final exams.

The discussions on the SuSanA forum suggest similar examples which already exist for people interested in learning more about different aspects of sanitation and consider other possible ways the sector could benefit from the idea of MOOCs. I have undertaken a MOOC myself in Quantitative Methods in Public Health through HarvardX, and found the knowledge that thousands of students around the world were also keeping up with the course each week extremely motivating. It was also great to see the peer-learning process in action: one course participant was even promoted to teaching assistant by the organizers because she was so committed and helpful to fellow students on the discussion boards.

Recent and in-development WASH tools

Sanitation Mapper tool – SHARE Consortium

www.sharereseach.org/Resource/Details/sanitation_mapper_tool

The Sanitation Mapper is a free and simple sanitation monitoring tool developed by the Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity (SHARE) consortium

and WaterAid. The tool is based on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which converts sanitation survey data to maps that can be viewed in Google Earth. The Sanitation Mapper can help inform decision-making and planning at district and sub-district level, with both area-based mapping (e.g. village-level coverage) and point-based mapping (e.g. shared latrines in slums). The tool needs minimal training, has a free accompanying user guide, can be used offline in the field, and can be customized for different indicators and countries. I have used the Water Point Mapper with WaterAid in Mali and am looking forward to trying out the Sanitation version too.

Financial analysis tool for urban sanitation – WSUP

www.wsup.com/sharing/practicenote9.htm

www.wsup.com/sharing/topicbrief10.htm

Urban sanitation planning often stalls when it comes to predicting the cost of different sanitation options for low-income areas. Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) and its partners in Dhaka, Bangladesh, have developed a tool which uses Microsoft Excel to help planners assess the costs of different options at a preliminary planning stage. A short briefing paper and practice note explain how the tool has been used so far and describe some of the challenges, such as obtaining good data on unit costs to input into the tool. Further development of the tool is ongoing and similar tools are in development elsewhere by WSUP and its partners focusing on different parts of the sanitation chain, for example faecal sludge management services in Lusaka and financial mechanisms for communal sanitation block services in Maputo.

Sanitation Hackathon prize winners

www.sanitationhackathon.org/stories/world-bank-awards-three-mobile-developer-teams-apps-addressing-sanitation-needs

In December 2012 I dropped in on the UK event of the global Sanitation Hackathon, organized by WSUP in London. The Sanitation Hackathon and App Challenge were World Bank initiatives designed to create links between local communities, software developers and sanitation experts to identify sanitation problems where mobile technology could contribute possible solutions. The World Bank has now announced three winners from over 70 entrants in 40 cities worldwide. **mSchool**, developed by the mobile and internet services firm Manobi in Dakar, Senegal, is a tool that enables students, parents, and teachers to monitor and report on sanitation facilities in schools using SMS. **Sun-Clean** is an app which includes two games for children to teach good sanitation and hygiene practices, developed by students at the University of Indonesia. **Taarifa**, developed by a team from across England, Germany, the United States and Tanzania, is a web application to help the public identify and respond to complaints from citizens about sanitation services.