

Guest editorial: sanitation as a business

IN THIS ISSUE OF *Waterlines* we explore some aspects of how the private sector may play a more prevalent role in sanitation. What does it mean when we speak of sanitation in the context of the private sector? Sanitation is not only a private good, but also a public good and a public right. The health, environmental, and socio-economic benefits of improved sanitation and hygiene practices are the most compelling arguments for public sector measures (establishing a policy and legislative framework, setting standards and rules of the game, planning, financing, coordination but also regulation and oversight with respect to the whole sanitation chain) to enable, facilitate, and promote improved sanitation.

Although one may argue that there have been good examples of the role of the private sector in the past and that this could be a form of institutional amnesia, the point is that key players in the sector are realizing that they cannot work alone and further harmonization with other actors including those in the private sector needs to be taken up in a more constructive manner. In contrast to earlier initiatives within our wonderfully 'woolly world of WASH' over the decades, measurement of success has been by counting the number of newly constructed toilets. However, recent approaches emphasize the importance of behaviour change and access to safe sanitation facilities through a combination of community and household actions complemented by public and private service providers as the most important elements. This refreshing development taking place in our WASH sector with a far stronger emphasis on *market-based approaches* is gaining increasing attention and sanitation demand and uptake are being stimulated through activities initiated by private sector entrepreneurs.

Within the context of this edition, a focus is placed on the various ways in which sanitation authorities, regulators, entrepreneurs, implementers, and supporters can work together to enable sanitation services as potentially viable, vibrant, and socially responsible businesses that meet both public sector targets and household expectations. This thematic overview initially derived from a conference which took place earlier in 2014 in Kampala, Uganda entitled 'Sanitation as a Business: Unclogging the Blockages' organized by Water for People, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, Population Services International, Sustainable Sanitation Alliance, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council-Global Sanitation Fund, Water Sanitation for the Urban Poor, Ministry of Water and Environment & Ministry of Health in Uganda, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Johnson & Johnson. Three articles in this edition have emerged from this conference. The first, by Mulumba et al., reflects on how sanitation marketing or sanitation supply chain development-related concepts are increasingly introduced and successfully taken up by organizations in a number of countries. However, programmes often

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© Practical Action Publishing, 2014, www.practicalactionpublishing.org
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3362/1756-3488.2014.020>, ISSN: 0262-8104 (print) 1756-3488 (online)

still focus on the 'low hanging fruits': a limited number of issues (e.g. introduction of appropriate and affordable sanitation technologies) and easy areas (e.g. relatively high demand for sanitation products and services, and the existence of a core group of interested entrepreneurs).

In the second article, Williams and Sauer recognize that sanitation does require a multi-sector approach to leverage resources, platforms, expertise, and experiences. The article focuses on the development of cross-sector business incubation centres (BIC) in which sanitation enterprises can work with various partners. And the third article based on the conference is by Sugden who reflects on the attractiveness of the sanitation latrine itself using visceral, behavioural, and reflective design levels to analyse what one considers to be a 'beautiful latrine' and how to create the 'WOW' response from the potential consumer.

All of the papers here are based on the principle that sanitation products and services must be tailored to the needs of the users. Furthermore they need to be easily available, attractive, and affordable. This, in essence, is about realizing the balance between creating demand and ensuring supply, and in that process improving and monitoring services. In order for this to work human capacity has to be well aligned and balanced with financing. This is reflected further in the article by Ekane et al., which focuses on more institutional developments, specifically emphasizing such concepts as multi-level governance, path dependency, and institutional inertia to understand the challenges of sanitation in sub-Saharan African countries. It focuses on the demand-driven strategies and private sector involvement in the sanitation sector as paramount for establishing new sanitation paradigms and socio-technical regimes.

Two articles from Malawi reflect how these concepts are put into field reality. The first, by Cole et al., reflects on the role of government partners in sanitation marketing and the need to provide government staff with market research training to better understand the local sanitation marketing context. The second, by Holm et al., focuses on private sector participation in rural sanitation marketing, reflecting on the opportunities and barriers facing entrepreneurs who wish to take up sanitation services as a business. Creating training for potential entrepreneurs and a sanitation fund are key to further success.

What all of these papers make clear is that although there is some way to go before finding the 'right balance' in optimizing the match between demand and supply for sanitation goods and services under different circumstances, we are starting to get more key stakeholders in the public and private sectors to work together in a more synchronized manner. This means we see not only hope, but also concrete action, leading to the further sustainability of sanitation for everyone (forever!).

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