

Waterlines – the final editorial

Richard C. Carter

Recently, the difficult decision was taken to discontinue the journal *Waterlines*. The reasons concerned the financial viability of the publication – an ironic reminder perhaps that the financial dimension of sustainability affects not only services and behaviours such as water, sanitation, and hygiene, but also publishing, too.

The first issue of *Waterlines* came out in July 1982, in illustrated magazine format. Later (in 2008), the format changed to the more familiar academic journal style that continued until very recently. Throughout its 40-year life, the journal has provided a place where applied academic research and learning from practitioners could coexist. We sought to link research, policy, and practice, and provide not only food for thought, but also examples of good practice.

The journal started its life as a vehicle to communicate ‘appropriate technologies for water supply and sanitation’. In the 1980s (the first United Nations International Water Supply and Sanitation Decade), the notion of ‘appropriate technology’ was seen as critical for progress towards water and sanitation for all by 1990. But those working in the water and sanitation sectors were becoming increasingly aware that, however ‘appropriate’ the technology was, it was not enough. The social, institutional, financial, economic, and environmental aspects of ‘watsan’ were equally as important as the technology, and unless all were considered, progress would falter.

Increasingly, the human aspects of what came to be called WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) became evident. Handwashing and other hygiene behaviours, the actual use and care of sanitation facilities, payment for and participation in the upkeep of water infrastructure – these are all now taken for granted. Similarly, deficiencies in WASH, and the benefits to people that are achievable when WASH is improved, are now well-known.

Waterlines tried to reflect the learning that those working in WASH were acquiring. In some areas, the journal really helped to put ‘on the map’ subjects that were far from mainstream at the time – menstrual health and hygiene, solutions that work for people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ issues, the place of informal sanitation workers, to name a few.

Waterlines benefitted from the commitment and hard work of many individuals over the years – the publishing team at Practical Action Publishing, led for many years by Clare Tawney; and the editorial team, in particular Sue Cavill, Paul Hutchings, and, most recently Dotun Adekile, Cara Flowers, and Leslie Morris-Iveson. We also had the benefit of a large group who formed the Editorial Advisory Board. Last but not least, no journal can function without the work of the many anonymous referees who read, assess, and provide valuable feedback to authors.

I single out one member of our Editorial Advisory Board for special mention. Jeroen Ensink was a passionate teacher and researcher at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. After his tragic death, *Waterlines* introduced an annual prize in his memory, awarded to the best paper from the previous

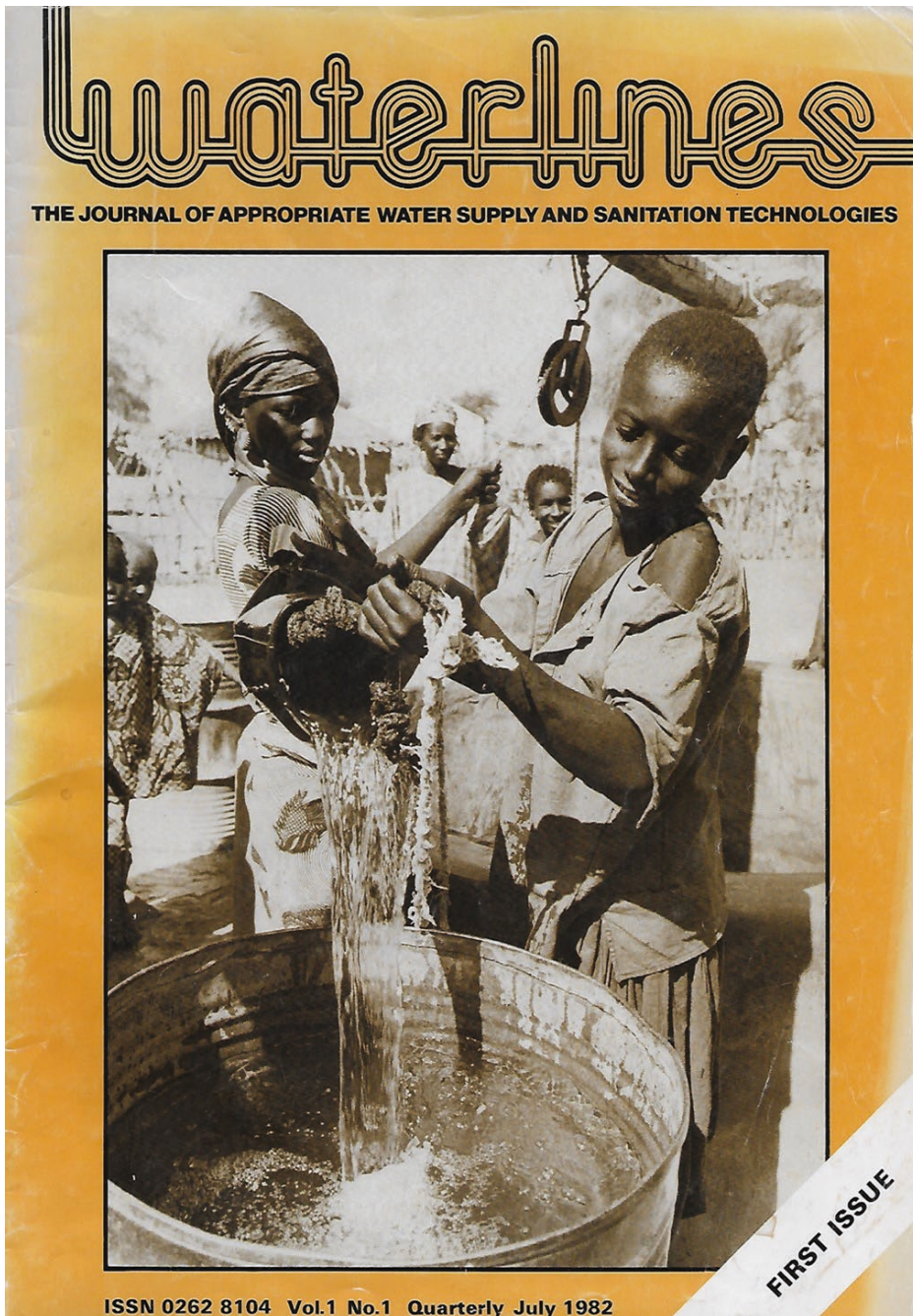


Figure 1 The cover of the very first issue in 1982

calendar year. This prize will be awarded at least once more, and its future is under consideration at the time of writing.

What about the legacy of the journal? The publishing and editorial teams are in active discussions about how to repackage, reissue, and make available the great wealth of content gathered over four decades. Much of it still has relevance to the continuing endeavour to get adequate water and sanitation services to everyone, to bring about hygiene practices that make good health possible, and to see all these changes continuing permanently.

A final reflection: the journal has served its purpose well for over four decades, as attested by the comments below. Its demise is a sad day for all who have been involved, but the publishing environment has changed a great deal recently, and adaptation is necessary. We remain determined that the legacy of the journal will persist.

Messages from editorial advisory board members

'There is so much valuable evidence and information in the past editions of the *Waterlines* journals. It has been a pleasure serving as an Editorial Board Member over the last 20 years'. (Sam Godfrey)

'As a student of Richard's in the 1980s, I found the journal invaluable in providing practical insights into water, sanitation, and hygiene, which as someone who wanted to focus on practical action (no pun intended) in the field rather than simply theoretical understandings, was exactly what I needed. Many of my early forays into writing papers came courtesy of *Waterlines* and we should never overlook the importance of the journal in providing pathways for professionals early in their careers to get their work published and noticed. I think I have been on the board since the mid-1990s and have seen the journal continue to develop but retain its unique nature and value'. (Guy Howard)

'Sad about *Waterlines*. I think that's what got me into this whole thing. My mum used to donate to ITDG and I seem to remember I used a technical brief from an early 90s edition on an A-level geography assignment on biogas digesters in Sri Lanka'. (Sean Furey)

'Let me add my voice to those of others who have said what a sad day this is. I fully understand why this decision might be necessary, but I do think it is worth noting the impact that *Waterlines* has had on all our lives. At the beginning of my career, it was a wonderful, practical, inspiring resource. It has evolved mightily over the years, and we owe the editorial team thanks and congratulations for what has been achieved. I am glad to hear much of what was published will find new life in other forms. I hope we can make it as accessible as possible'. (Clarissa Brocklehurst)

'I would like to second Clarissa's message as it reflects very much the value that *Waterlines* has had both to me as an individual and to the sector as a whole. It is a real shock to hear of its passing and I would like to thank the editorial team very much for all they put into it over the years. Past issues remain a valuable resource

and hopefully will remain accessible and even find a new life in some form yet to be developed'. (Sally Sutton)

'It's certainly a real shame that *Waterlines* is to be discontinued. But, on a positive note, we can reflect upon how influential the journal has been in the WASH sector and how useful it has been to many hundreds of practitioners and researchers worldwide'. (Jonathan Parkinson)

'I can think of so many well-grounded and well-written papers from the likes of John Briscoe, Pete Kolsky, Sandy [Cairncross] – and of course Val [Curtis] – that were published by *Waterlines*'. (Ollie Cumming)

'These publications changed the world, so I am saddened by this news even though I understand. The sector is better because of Practical Action's dedication to this project for decades, and I am grateful'. (Ned Breslin)

'Like many others on this thread, I made eager use of the articles in the journal, which were practical in nature and well informed. *Waterlines*' start in 1982 coincided with my first overseas posting in Kenya and I guess we've both had a good run ...'. (Jan Willem Rosenboom)

'Just echoing sad congratulations for 40 years of *Waterlines* – I'm an academic and have loved reading/contributing articles that have been peer-reviewed but are also practical in nature (down with ivory towers!)'. (Dani Barrington)

Richard C. Carter, Editor, March 2023