

books

On-Plot Sanitation in Low-Income Urban Communities: A review of literature

by A.P. Cotton,
R.W.A. Franceys, J.A. Pickford,
and D. Saywell
WEDC, Loughborough, 1995.
80pp. Pbk. £5.95.

This book is aimed both at project implementers, and at academics, including both references and recommendations. Its objective is 'to present a review of published information about latrines that have proved in practice to be ... sustainable'. It will be a good reference work for people designing or implementing latrine projects who want to learn about others' experiences of other schemes. It is a 'this is what is happening at the moment' book, not a 'this is how you do it' handbook.

On-Plot Sanitation paints a picture on a world-wide scale. It uses a vast array of secondary sources to describe current trends and characteristics. Most of the information is up-to-date and, when the authors feel particular statistics might be suspect, they provide suitable warnings.

A third of the book consists of references, useful if there is a well-stocked library to hand, or within reasonable access. The language tends to be rather flowery and may confuse readers for whom English is not their first language. The subjects, however, are site-specific, and drawing global conclusions is, understandably, difficult.

After identifying that project approach is just as important as implementation, the book raises the issues of how to support the continued use of latrines. The chapter on health and social matters talks about some of the gender and social factors which need to be acknowledged when trying to make latrine projects work.

The book contains good, solid points on what the most important operation and management factors are if the latrine technology is to be acceptable. These aspects are more important to the planner than some of the technical aspects, for which there is an abundance of literature. I thought more could have been made of this section, which contains many crucial pointers on why projects fail. Especially entertaining is the anecdote about

printing leaflets for women who cannot read!

A checklist for implementers, making sure they have not forgotten to consider 'killer assumptions', can be pulled together, although it would have been helpful to include it as a separate item. The next book in the series will probably include such a list, as it will report on site investigations to determine the requirements and conditions for success.

The title refers to urban situations but, as the author points out, most of the information comes from general settings as, for now, there is little published on urban situations.

On the whole, the book poses many questions and answers most of them well. It presents the diverse experiences of latrine projects worldwide, and identifies common themes. What emerges is an extremely varied picture — what is essential for success in some areas will kill off attempts in others — local factors are extremely important. It is cheaper than most books on the subject, and is written by people with a great deal of combined experience. Spending £5.95 on this book, and using the information at the planning stage could save a lot more in avoidable mistakes.

If I was adding to a 'latrines library', I would certainly include this book. If I was going to buy only three or four books to use on the project, I would spend my money on others.

Jonathan Puddifoot

Operation and Maintenance of Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Systems: A guide for managers

WHO, Geneva, 1994.

112pp. Pbk. £12.50.

ISBN 92 4 15447161 6

The development of water supplies and sanitation systems has been a priority of many governments and support agencies, as an essential step towards improving the health status of the communities they serve. Unfortunately, in many cases, the available resources have been used largely for the design and construction of facilities — little thought or effort has gone into ensuring efficient operation and main-

tenance (O&M), or into project evaluation. As a result, in many cities in the South, more than half the water supply is unaccounted for, wastage is high, tariffs have to be subsidized, and there are no funds to extend the services to fringe areas.

This publication describes a systems approach to the O&M of drinking-water supply and sanitation services, outlining the priority programmes, projects, and responsibilities of managers at different levels, with particular emphasis on controlling water losses. The importance of an efficient management information system is stressed, as is the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the services provided. The procedures described will be of interest to managers and other decision-makers who wish to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of an urban water supply and sanitation agency. Their application, with adaptation as

Water Supply and Sanitation for Developing Countries: A directory of UK-based research 1992-1995 Andrew Cotton and Darren Saywell WEDC, Loughborough, 1995.

92pp. Pbk. Free +£2 p&p.

The success of its 1993 directory has prompted the Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC), with funding from the UK's Overseas Development Administration (ODA), to bring out a follow-up volume, covering 1992 to 1995. Like the original, this edition includes current and completed projects, and covers engineering, environment, health, management and institutional development, social and community development, economics and planning.

necessary, will help ensure high-quality, reliable services, leading to more user satisfaction and, ultimately, improved public health.

The book is intended as a guide to strengthening the technical, operational, and managerial capabilities required to operate and maintain water and sanitation services according to acceptable norms of quality, continuity, reliability, and cost. The ultimate objective is to provide the consumer with the best service at the lowest cost. The publication is in five parts: 'The systems approach to management'; 'Management of operation and maintenance'; 'Planning and control of operation and maintenance'; 'Information systems'; and 'Implementation'.

WHO emphasizes that 'the publication should serve as a reference source and conceptual framework for agencies formulating development programmes ... [it] should be used to supplement but not replace existing manuals'.