



Dear Colleague,

There is a particular and urgent reason for devoting these pages to the task of listening.

Decades of effort and billions of dollars expended on water and sanitation have so far failed to bring more than a fraction of their expected benefits to the developing world.

Will the next decade be any different?

More specifically, what would it take to achieve the *Millennium Development Goals* of halving the proportion of people without safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015?

This is not just a question of resources. Indeed even a very significant increase in the funds available would be unlikely to bring the goals within reach.

This judgement is based on the fact that almost all of those who work with communities to promote water, sanitation and hygiene believe that conventional approaches are fatally flawed – and that ‘more of the same’ will lead not to the achievement of the goals but to more years of failure and frustration.

It is therefore appropriate to pause at this point and consider this question of the approach – of the underlying assumptions that guide billions of dollars of investments, of the paradigm that determines the ratio between resources and results.

This is all the more necessary as it becomes clear that significant breakthroughs have recently been made. With compelling unanimity, those most closely involved in water and sanitation programmes now believe that the basic principles of success have been identified and tested. All over the developing world, there are pioneering programmes being run by communities, often supported by NGOs and sometimes by international agencies, that are achieving sustained success.

Today, therefore, the key issue in water and sanitation is not, primarily, the availability of resources. It is the willingness on the part of those who allocate those resources to learn the lessons of both past failures and current successes.

That is why the WSSCC believes that, at the present time, the greatest contribution it can make towards achieving the *Millennium Development Goals* for water and sanitation is to listen to, and if possible to amplify, the voices of those who have felt the frustrations of failure, those who have helped pioneer the successes, and those who have lived and learnt the lessons from both.

This publication therefore attempts to bring to an international audience the views of some of those who are too rarely heard in the international development debate – the practitioners who work with communities.

‘LISTENING’ also prepares the way for a regular *People’s Right to Water and Sanitation Report* to be published by the WSSCC every two years, beginning in 2005 and continuing until the 2015 target year for reaching the *Millennium Development Goals*.

Dr. Jan Pronk
Chairman
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The traditional top-down methods for providing water and sanitation services in poor communities of the developing world have not been successful in reaching out to all. Despite decades of effort and billions of dollars, 1 billion people still lack safe water and almost 2.5 billion lack safe sanitation. The time has therefore come to re-orient national and international efforts in support of a different approach.

'LISTENING' is about that new approach. It is an approach which has learnt from the failures of the past and begun to achieve well-documented successes of its own. But it is an approach that is not yet universally accepted because of the many vested interests that stand in its way.

In brief, decentralisation and empowerment of people and communities to enable them to take more control of their own lives and to support them in achieving their own development goals must be the method and the aim. But this does not mean that the responsibility to mobilise additional resources for the poor, and to create an enabling environment within which they can move forward, should be abandoned. In fact the responsibility for initiating and supporting community-led approaches means an even greater and more demanding role for government.

'LISTENING' attempts to bring these lessons – through the voices of many of those who have been most closely involved – to a wider international audience.

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Listening web

www.wsscc.org/listening
This newly created section of the Council's website will offer, in addition to downloadable versions of this publication in English, French and Spanish, a web database of the statistical compendium, and new material unavailable in the printed version of the publication.

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) was mandated by a 1990 UN resolution to accelerate progress towards safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all (WASH). All concerned organisations and individuals are invited to join in this global partnership and help make WASH a reality for all and a foundation for sustainable development.

LISTENING

All contributions were made by personal interview (see page 17). All contributors speak in their personal capacities.

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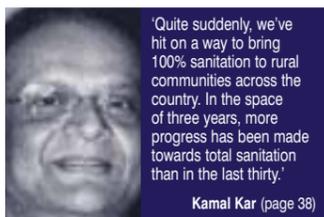
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Database compiled by Matthew England, WSSCC, Geneva



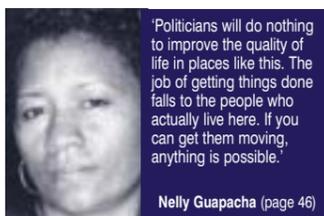
'Community-led sanitation illustrates the possibility of a fundamental change in the relationship between politicians and the poor: a relationship in which no hands are held up in supplication.'

Sheela Patel (page 18)



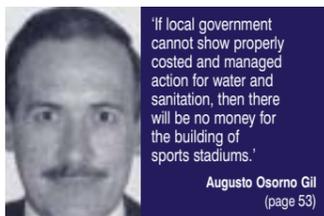
'Quite suddenly, we've hit on a way to bring 100% sanitation to rural communities across the country. In the space of three years, more progress has been made towards total sanitation than in the last thirty.'

Kamal Kar (page 38)



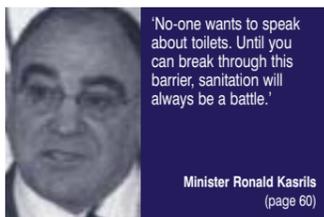
'Politicians will do nothing to improve the quality of life in places like this. The job of getting things done falls to the people who actually live here. If you can get them moving, anything is possible.'

Nelly Guapacha (page 46)



'If local government cannot show properly costed and managed action for water and sanitation, then there will be no money for the building of sports stadiums.'

Augusto Osorno Gil (page 53)



'No-one wants to speak about toilets. Until you can break through this barrier, sanitation will always be a battle.'

Minister Ronald Kasrils (page 60)



'The way we deal with communities right now, we are undermining their intelligence, their dignity, their capability, and their innovativeness.'

Tsepo Khumbane (page 69)

INTRODUCTION

The basics of public health – water, sanitation, and hygiene – are now back on the international agenda. But why have decades of effort and billions of dollars of investment in water and sanitation programmes yielded so little progress? What has been learnt? What are the new approaches that work? Why are they not yet gaining traction? And what can be done to turn the tide of failure and achieve the *Millennium Development Goals* for water and sanitation?

This introduction draws together some of the most commonly held and strongly felt views of the many contributors to this publication who have helped to pioneer the new ways forward.

IT IS THE OFTEN-STATED VIEW of the WSSCC that the greatest mistake of national and international development efforts over the last 50 years has been the failure to secure the basics of a better quality of life – safe water, sanitation, and hygiene.

The supporting arguments for this are distilled on the inside front cover of this publication, and need not be repeated here.

There are now signs that the seriousness of the mistake is beginning to be recognised. The UN *Millennium Goals*, adopted by the international community as the aim and measure of the development effort for the years ahead, include a specific commitment "to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water and the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation." The UN has also asked for a doubling of the resources available to reach these goals, including a doubling of international aid.

Does all this mean that development's 'great mistake' is about to be put right?

Not in the view of most of the contributors to this publication. Their almost unanimous judgement, shared by the WSSCC, is that the water and sanitation goals are unlikely to be achieved by more of the same.

The reason for such pessimism is not, primarily, the lack of resources for water and sanitation programmes. It is the lack of willingness on the part of those who allocate those resources to learn from past failures. And in particular it is a lack of willingness to consider the implications of the new approaches that have been developed and the lessons that have been learned over recent years.

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PAST FAILURE

Let there be no doubt about the extent of past failure. Over the last three decades, billions of dollars have been invested in water and sanitation – to very little effect. From India to Bolivia, Kenya to Nepal, are to be found the ruins of now-defunct water and sanitation programmes that have never yielded more than a fraction of the benefits expected.

Almost all of the contributors to this publication take the fact of this failure as their starting point:-

“A lot of effort was put into increasing coverage over the ten years of the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, but very little actually came of it” says UNICEF Madagascar’s Gilbert Nkusi (page 66).

“Three decades, millions of dollars, and hundreds of kilometres of water pipes have not been translated into better health for the people,” says Nepal’s Umesh Pandey (page 44).

“The UN’s Water Supply and Sanitation Decade of the ‘80s came and went without bringing significant improvements to the lives of the poor,” agrees Nepalese engineer and former Minister Dipak Gyawali (page 43).

“Why after hundreds of millions of dollars of investment,” asks Bolivian civil engineer Marco Quiroga (page 58), “do so many people still lack access to clean water and basic sanitation?”

“Despite decades of investment,” says Colombia’s former Director of Water and Sanitation Services (page 53), “half of Colombia’s people lack access to safe water and basic sanitation.”

To this chorus could be added the voices of many more who would point out that even where ‘coverage’ and ‘access’ have increased the health benefits have failed to follow.

In short, almost all of the participants in this publication would agree that the old approach to providing water and sanitation services is fatally flawed, and that simply pouring more billions of dollars into a cracked vessel will lead not to the *Millennium Development Goals* but to more years of failure and frustration. Similarly, increasing the funds available for further large-scale, delivery-oriented infrastructures will achieve very little without a re-think of how and for whom such funds are to be spent. ‘Business as usual’ is likely to bring most of its benefits to business rather than to the poor. “The old approaches,” says Indian sanitation expert Chandan Sengupta (page 27), “have unambiguously failed.”

SIGNPOSTS

At the core of that failure has been the attempt to ‘deliver’ solutions from the outside – usually in the form of installing hardware – to communities who have had no involvement in, or ownership of, the process.

“No progress is possible,” says Jockin Arputham, President of India’s *National Slum Dwellers Federation* (page 20), “until the urban authorities stop trying to hand down centrally planned solutions. The urban elites are still clinging to the notion that they are the greatest experts in solving problems faced by the poor. It is an attitude which has led to literally thousands of failed projects.”

Many contributors to this publication offer their experience in support of this analysis – an analysis which challenges the underlying assumptions that guide most present investments in water and sanitation.

But for the future the important point is that almost all of those who work closely with poor communities to improve water, sanitation and hygiene now believe that a ‘method breakthrough’ has now been made, or at least that the principles of success have been laid bare, and that progress could now be accelerated. In the words of Sait Damodaran (page 33), we have “at least identified the basic principles of an approach which could now be employed to bring clean water, safe sanitation, and hygiene awareness to millions.”

But this optimism is everywhere subsumed under a suspicion – in some cases a certainty – that the lessons of these years are not being heard or applied.

That is why this publication is dedicated to listening to, and if possible amplifying, the voices of those with long experience of, and commitment to, the cause of ‘water, sanitation and hygiene for all’. Pages 17 to 72 bring together the contributions of engineers, sociologists, doctors, community and NGO leaders, government ministers, local government officials, academics, and private sector executives from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Many more contributors could have been chosen (and many more have in fact been interviewed and their views published on the WSSCC web-site).

This introduction attempts to draw together some of the most frequently voiced and strongly felt concerns.

A NEW APPROACH

Taken together, these contributions add up to a description, from many different perspectives, of the ‘new approach’ to water and sanitation in poor urban and rural communities of the developing world.

But in truth it is an approach that has been pioneered over at least two decades, and its basic ideas and above all its vocabulary – ‘community participation’, ‘people-centred’, ‘demand-driven’, ‘empowerment’ ‘rights based’ – have entered into the mainstream of national and international discussion. Indeed governments and international agencies today would find it difficult to discuss the issue without a ritual chanting of the new liturgy.

Nonetheless, we are clearly dealing here with a religion that is more honoured in the letter than the spirit, and lip-service at national and international level disguises the fact that the new strategies are not yet gaining significant traction on the ground. Pilot projects and programmes have achieved remarkable and illuminating successes. But there is as yet little sign of ‘going to scale’.

So let us dispense with the letter of the new approach and attend to its moving spirit. What in essence is the new approach that almost all of the contributors to this publication believe to be the way forward?

A NEW LEVEL OF DEMAND

The common core of the message in these pages is that success depends on sparking a radically different kind of demand for water and sanitation, and on an equally radical definition of ‘community participation’.

Demand creation is an old mantra, born of long experience of latrines that go uncleaned, unmaintained, and eventually unused. But in practice, demand creation has too easily come to mean an ill-attended hygiene lecture or a tired poster on a clinic wall. And the result has too often been a tepid, not-really-a-priority, if-you-say-so kind of ‘demand’ that is incapable of driving through real, long-term change against all of the other difficulties of life in a poor community.

In this context, many of the contributors would argue that health information alone can never be enough. More sophisticated approaches based not only on scientific facts but on “a sense of self-awareness and self-esteem” (page 48) are everywhere seen as necessary if habitual behaviours are to be changed. And in this the experience of ‘demand creation’ or ‘social marketing’ parallels the experience of the industrialised nations where, despite educated populations and unprecedented communications capacity, health education about smoking, diet or exercise has met with limited success.

The contributions of Nelly Guapacha (page 46), Mariela Garcia (page 50), Anibal Valencia (page 48) Kamal Kar (page 38), Chandan Sengupta (page 27) and Ronald Kasrils (page 60) discuss the ‘demand’ issue in more detail and in different settings. And all are directed in their different ways to a qualitatively different kind of demand that can bring about the necessary “psychological shift in attitudes to sanitation”.

In particular, one of the approaches discussed in these pages may represent a significant and widely applicable breakthrough. In settings as diverse as El Hormiguero in Colombia (page 46)

and the villages of Bangladesh (page 38), imaginative new techniques for allowing communities to see themselves as others might see them have clearly succeeded in appealing to deep wells of pride and shame. The result has been a 'demand' for water and sanitation of a qualitatively different kind – an urgent, determined, not-to-be-denied demand which is capable of leading to permanent change. "Once those feelings of self-respect are ignited," says Kamal Kar (page 38), "the community will carry the project forward with real drive and determination – there is no inertia, no passivity."

Demand creation, perhaps more properly called demand education, is a challenge that will everywhere vary with the contours of culture and custom. But projects like the pioneering and now very large scale effort being undertaken in Medinipur in West Bengal, India, and in villages of Bangladesh, have shown that given access to small loans, a choice of low-cost latrines, and the right kind of information, the people of most poor communities are usually only too willing to express their demand (pages 25, 26, 27).

PARTICIPATION AND POLITICS

Secondly, the new approach depends on an equally radical re-invigoration of what is meant by community participation.

As with demand, the mantra of 'participation' arises from long experience of projects and programmes that were initiated from the outside only to wither away after a few months or years because they had no roots in the community.

But the extent of lip-service paid to the idea of participation has in recent years threatened to tame the idea to the point where it means no more than communities being cajoled (or bribed by direct subsidies) into setting up committees ('with at least two women') to participate in implementing other people's solutions without any genuine consultation with the community or any consideration for its realities.

This does not add up to participation any more than a hygiene lecture adds up to demand.

Real participation and real development is essentially a political process. It is about the community organising itself to make decisions and take action. It is about the ending of dependence and supplicancy. It is about seeing improvements as being within the community's own reach and rights. It is about challenging relationships between the poor and their political representatives. It is about negotiating to remove political barriers. It is about building a community's confidence and self-esteem in order to release its energies and skills. It is about awakening the determination of communities to improve their own lives by their own efforts; and it is about organising to demand that those efforts be supported by local and national political leadership.

The participatory approach to water and sanitation programmes begins with locally viable plans drawn up with communities themselves; with their organisations and their resources; with consideration for their present struggles and coping strategies; and with recognition for the obstacles they currently encounter. As the WSSCC has long argued, it is not only increasing access to water and sanitation but increasing access to the management of water and sanitation that will determine whether lasting progress is made.

If this is the basis of the new approach, then it follows that the principal role of government is not to deliver solutions but to stimulate and support community-based initiatives. And it is equally obvious that the plans and solutions decided on should be of a kind that communities can see and understand, build and repair, manage and sustain.

Mariela Garcia, who helped develop *CINARA'S* 'team learning' approach in Colombia (page 50) defines both old and new approaches in these words:- .

"The root cause of the failure of so many water and sanitation projects has been the assumption that the problem is primarily technological and can therefore be resolved by engineers. Proceeding on this basis, the planners themselves define the problems that must be overcome

and the priorities that must be met. There is no space for consultation with the community, and no consideration of how the technical solution arrived at will fit with the cultural, socio-economic and environmental realities of the recipient community. The result is a total collapse of understanding between provider and recipient, and, ultimately, the community's refusal to use, pay for, and maintain the service."

The alternative approach reverses this process – "The people who live everyday with inadequate water and sanitation already possess resources of experience and knowledge that are essential for improving their situation. These people must not be seen as passive beneficiaries of a programme, but as key participants. Of course, the technical and managerial knowledge of outside agencies is essential; but in order for this contribution to be effective it must be based on the knowledge and experience of the community, on their social and economic realities, and on their traditional means of managing their water resources and their sanitation needs. Participation thus becomes the guiding thread of the programme, and the people come to feel that the programme corresponds to their own ideas and their own priorities."

The same argument, in different contexts, is made by almost all of the contributors. And where this kind of participation has been achieved the results can defy all normal expectations. "In cities across India," says Sheela Patel, leader of an NGO working with India's slum and pavement dwellers organisations (page 18), "communities have shown themselves able to deliver sanitation facilities that are properly thought through, well built and efficiently run."

Or to take a rural example, one of the pioneers of this approach in Bangladesh reports (page 38) that the programme "encourages the community to design and build their own latrines, according to local conditions and to what they feel they can afford. The villagers, with minimal support from external facilitators, have shown an absolutely staggering degree of technical ingenuity. Using their own skills and the materials at hand – bamboo, tin, gas pipes – they have designed more than 30 different models of latrine which can be built for a fraction of the costs involved in most of the 'low cost' solutions designed by outsiders."

These and other outstanding examples of the 'new approach' suggest the enormous potential. It is an approach based on the conviction that the motivation, energies, and talents within poor communities are the greatest resource for the achievement of the *Millennium Development Goals* for water and sanitation – as for so much else. And the real challenge of reaching those goals is the challenge of finding ways and means by which national governments and international organisations can stimulate and support this internal potential rather than attempting to deliver solutions from outside.

WOMEN'S WORK

A third hallmark of the new approach to the problem of water and sanitation – discussed by many contributors – is the real as opposed to token recognition that it is women who are most likely to be the basis of the solution. Whether it is Jockin Arputham's wry suggestion that "It is worth trying to avoid working through the men at this stage" (page 20) or Nelly Guapacha's statement that "The Women's Committee was the match that struck this community alight" (page 46), there is a widespread consensus that it is the women of a community who are likely to be the rock on which real demand and real participation is built.

Some of the reasons for this are all too obvious. It is women who usually have to cope with frequent family illness; it is also the women who have to fetch and manage water; and it is women who have the greatest need for a private – and safe – place in which to defecate.

Many contributors would go further than the idea of women's participation, arguing that if progress is to be achieved then women must lead the new approach. This view seems to arise from practical experience rather than ideological prejudice. And it is almost impossible to listen for any length of time to those who work with communities without being aware of the widespread conviction that women not only suffer more from the lack of safe water and sanitation but also possess more of the qualities needed to do something about it.

MEASURING ENDS NOT MEANS

Finally, there is at least one other common and revealing indicator of a genuinely new approach; it is that progress towards water and sanitation goals must be measured not by counting the number of taps and latrines and dividing them into the total population served, but by recording changes in use, behaviour, and above all improvements in health.

The importance of this is that measures have a habit of becoming aims.

In particular, measuring progress in water and sanitation has tended to become an exercise in pump and latrine-counting, with too little regard for such questions of whether or not the latrines are used, whether or not hands are washed afterwards, and whether or not the incidence of diarrhoeal disease begins to fall. This confuses ends and means, and has led to statistical successes being proclaimed while children continue to die in unthinkable numbers of common, preventable disease.

This issue of how progress is to be monitored has become particularly important as national governments and international agencies fix their eyes on the world-wide goals of halving the proportion of people without safe water and sanitation. “We are not against having goals and targets,” comments Ashoke Chatterjee (page 30), “but if people start chasing figures again, without thinking about the process that they’re using to get there, then we’re on for another disaster.”

Meanwhile, several contributors have in fact suggested a new and dramatically simple means of measuring progress – arguing that the real aim and measure of sanitation programmes should be the elimination of open defecation.

“If the campaign is focused only on the building of latrines,” says Dr. Surjya Kanta Mishra, Minister in the Government of West Bengal and a former doctor and local government leader who helped launch the well-known Medinipur sanitation project (page 25), “there will always be people who are not reached, people who continue to defecate in the open and who continue to pollute the water sources and spread disease. High levels of latrine coverage, therefore, are simply not good enough.”

“At the very least,” he adds, “this movement should be marching under the banner ‘No Open Defecation’. Ultimately, we’re aiming to create an even more profound change – ‘Sanitation as a Way of Life’. That phrase implies a psychological adjustment that will lead not just to the use of latrines but also to the washing of hands, the cutting of nails, the safe preparation of food, the refusal to spit in public places and the vigilant protection of local water bodies from all sources of contamination. This attitude of mind – not building toilets – will lead to the really dramatic improvement of public health.”

Several contributors are currently involved in pioneering *Community-Led Total Sanitation* (CLTS) programmes of this kind (pages 25, 26, 33, 38). All are agreed that more sophisticated means of motivation are necessary. And some are convinced that the answer is “hitting the nerves of pride, shame and disgust, and igniting a sense of self-respect that is strong enough to counter a lifetime of habit and centuries of custom” (page 38).

Combining motivation with monitoring, villages in Bangladesh which have achieved ‘total sanitation’ have erected signs to the effect that ‘No-one in this village practises open defecation’ (page 40). In Maharashtra, the first Indian state to pilot the approach, this has been taken one step further with signs that read ‘Daughters from our village are not married into villages where open defecation is practised.’

These, then, are some of the essential elements that mark out the new approaches to water and sanitation. And as many of the contributions illustrate, it is an approach which has proved itself in many different settings.

Why then is this strategy not gaining momentum across the developing world? Who or what is applying the brakes?

WHY IS IT NOT HAPPENING?

There are many possible reasons why governments and international organisations might be wary of paying more than lip-service to these ideas.

First, not to put too fine a point on it, there is less money to be made. Compared to large contractor-led projects, a thousand small, community-led initiatives do not provide the same opportunities for export orders, international consultancies, private sector contracts, and public sector graft. Nor do they deliver the majority of the benefits to a relatively wealthy, urbanised minority who frequently exert a disproportionate influence on how resources are used. Nepal’s leading campaigner on the issue reports, for example (page 44), that “The Government is about to spend more than half of the decade’s resources on a water supply system for Kathmandu which will serve just 6% of the nation’s people. I would like to point out that those 6% include all the real decision makers in the sector.”

Yet even when there is a serious commitment to new policies at national government level, there are still significant obstacles in the way of implementation.

First, governments and international organisations tend to be geared to large-scale, big-budget, hierarchically-managed, hardware-oriented, statistically-monitored services delivered from the top down. In neither institutional structures nor in habits of mind are they comfortable with the idea of supporting large numbers of small-scale, low-budget, community-managed, behaviour-changing, demand-driven services.

Second, there is the problem that radical new policies can easily lose their edge by the time they have been passed down to local levels of government where the practical action is required. “Even the best new policies are weakened or destroyed by the time they reach the ground,” says Sait Damoran (page 33): “it is like passing a block of ice through many hands – by the time it reaches the poor, there is nothing left.”

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Beyond the management problems, as many of the contributors point out, there is the problem of the capability – and in many cases the willingness – of local governments to encourage and support community-led initiatives. For whatever initiatives a community may undertake on its own account, there will be a need for local or municipal government to provide logistical and practical support. Such support might include, for example, regulating local utility companies, determining prices and collecting and accounting for revenues, investing in and maintaining primary infrastructure, legislating to protect groundwater resources, and linking community efforts to secondary sewage facilities, waste-water removal, and garbage disposal.

Whether local and municipal authorities and public utilities discharge these responsibilities well or badly, transparently or corruptly, arbitrarily or accountably – is therefore critical to the success of community efforts. That is why new approaches to water and sanitation programmes must also embrace communities becoming organised not only for independent action but also to demand fairness, accountability, and competent service from their political representatives.

“I hope politicians will not misunderstand us,” says Joel Lugolobi, founder of a Ugandan NGO specialising in water and sanitation (page 59), “but we want to make communities understand that in order to get safe water and other basic needs they need to make their demands known ... We want them to understand that they have a right to ask for some improvement as part of the country’s development.”

In sum, the quality and integrity of local government is critical. And it is becoming clearer with each passing decade that only robustly democratic local institutions can ensure that these responsibilities are discharged fairly and transparently. Effective democratic representation is not an optional or alien concept in poor communities; it is the only guarantee that communities will be able to take more control of their own circumstances and that elected officials will represent their needs and their rights, stand up to local vested interests, and work to direct available resources in support of low cost services for the many rather than high-cost services for the few.

That is the ideal. The reality is often very different.

Time and again the voices in this publication return to this question of local and municipal government officials – to their competence, their training, their honesty, their accountability and their attitudes. And in addressing this critical issue, many are led to the same conclusion that it is the underlying relationship between poor communities and their political representatives that is the deepest threat.

PATRON AND CLIENT

That relationship, they argue, is too often based not on the firm ground of transparent and accountable representation but on the quick-sands of corruption and patronage. It is too often a relationship of patron to client, powerful to the powerless, benefactor to supplicant.

On one side of this relationship are local officials and office holders who in many cases have come to see themselves not in any sense as servants of the communities they represent, least of all of the poor of those communities, but as the possessors of a status from which they are entitled to derive benefits – psychological and financial, official and unofficial. This status must then be preserved by distributing public resources as ‘booty’ – whether it be in the form of food subsidies, housing rights, street lighting, taps, or toilets – in return for political support. On the other side, communities themselves have commonly fallen into, or have been left with little alternative but to accept, the passive role of dependents, supplicants, and if they can afford it – offerers of small bribes. In this way, the graft and corruption that is spoken of by so many contributors has become inseparable from the patron-client relationship that usurps genuine political representation.

The most trenchant analysis of this issue is offered by Sheela Patel (page 18):-

“Despite the fact that they have been elected by the poor, city politicians adopt the role of patron to the slum dweller – the one who can stay an eviction order, the one who can be bribed into helping a family or solving a particular problem. Often their very survival in office depends upon their ability to portray themselves as ‘protector of the slums’. In this scheme of things, it is essential that the slum dweller remains passive and vulnerable.”

The contribution of Ratnakar Gaikwad (page 22), a senior official in the Indian Public Service and a former Municipal Commissioner for Pune, only confirms what such critics have to say: “City politicians,” he argues, “will almost always try to develop their status as the ultimate ruler and protector of a slum, and that means cultivating a mentality of dependence in the slum residents. In Hindi we have a word for this – we call it a ‘May-Bap’ relationship, meaning ‘parent-child’ or ‘giver-taker’. Initiatives that encourage self-reliance strike at the root of that relationship.”

Kenyan NGO leader Josiah Omotto agrees (page 68): “City Councillors like to be seen ‘providing’ services to their constituents. Some of them also like to use their own favourite contractors.”

ATTITUDES

The failure of local democracy to adequately represent the interests of poor communities therefore lies close to the heart of the issue. But in the view of many contributors, this problem is not only a reflection of identifiable vested interest but of the instinctive attitudes of officials and urban elites. “It’s not just policies,” says the President of India’s *National Slum Dwellers Federation*, “The whole attitude of the governing classes demoralises the poor by telling them that they’re incapable and impotent.”

Many different contributors from different political settings describe this problem in strikingly similar terms. Kenya’s David Omayo (page 62) describes communities “sitting and waiting for the mzungu (white people) of the donor organisations, or someone from the City Council, to come and do it for them”. South Africa’s Tsepo Khumbane, a long-time activist for water and sanitation, believes (page 63) that “The way we deal with communities right now undermines their intelligence, their dignity, their capability, and their innovativeness.”

It would be difficult to overstate the threat that such attitudes pose to an approach which is based on participation, which demands respect for poor communities, and which sees in their knowledge, energies, and talents the chief resource for development.

HOW CAN IT BEGIN TO HAPPEN?

In the face of such formidable obstacles, how can the new approaches be given the opportunity to advance on a broader front?

To begin at the community level, many contributors stress the point that igniting ‘real demand’ and ‘real participation’ is not a process that happens by spontaneous combustion. Usually, it needs the spark provided by an organisation or individual from within or, more usually, from outside the community.

More often than not, it is non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are the source of that spark. Again and again it is NGOs that have ‘awakened’ communities’, catalysed action, learned and shared the lessons, and pioneered the new ways forward.

There are many tens of thousands of such NGOs, people’s movements, community organisations, and inspired individuals. And the hope must now be that a growing awareness of the work and the example of these organisations, and their growing capacity to build networks, will inspire a proliferation of such new approaches.

But the fact remains that there are simply not enough such organisations on the ground to ferment action on the necessary scale. Even by the most generous of definitions there are at least a billion people in the developing world who lack access to improved water supplies and two-and-a-half times that number who lack safe sanitation. “Not even all the NGOs put together,” says Shunmuga Paramasivan (page 34), “have the human and financial resources required to deliver water and sanitation to a country like India.”

This is therefore a battle that cannot be won by NGOs alone. They may blaze the trails and hold high the banners in the hope that others will follow; they may in certain cases overcome the indifference or opposition of officialdom by helping to create parallel structures of community organisation; and they may sometimes be able to provide a means for committed people working inside government bureaucracies to circumvent systems that they know to be failing; but ultimately it is new attitudes, structures, and policies within national and local government that can provide the necessary context of support to communities throughout the developing world.

The question of how water and sanitation goals can be achieved therefore becomes, in large part, a question of how national governments, and the bi-lateral and international agencies that work with them, can stimulate and support the new approaches to water and sanitation programmes.

Neither the WSSCC nor the contributors to this publication would pretend to have all the answers to this question. There are few one-size-fits all prescriptions for what is an essentially decentralised strategy. And it is more important that the challenge be taken up by those in a position to think the implications through in their own contexts. “It is essential,” says Sandy Cairncross (page 71), “that the vague, ill-defined vocabulary of recent years is developed into specific, realistic policies. Thinking that through is now the responsibility of everyone involved in the sector.”

But there is one universal prerequisite: if this is to become a serious and genuine process, then it is essential that the new approach should slip the silken threads of nominal acceptance and be confronted for what it is – a direct challenge to ‘business as usual’. The strategies under discussion demand a fundamental re-thinking of policies and priorities, attitudes and institutional structures. And if the many difficulties are to be worked through then what is required is not lip-service but soul-searching on behalf of all those who are, or who could be, involved.

A COMMON GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many of the contributors to this publication have addressed themselves to the implications for aid programmes and international agencies (the subject of the contribution by David Satterthwaite of the *International Institute for Environment and Development*, page 72).

For aid programmes, for example, the words of the engineer and political economist Dipak Gyawali (page 43) are particularly challenging. “The inefficient use of Northern taxpayer resources,” he argues, “is a feature of most donor-sponsored programs. In a recent study of water supply projects in Nepal, we found that the cost of services provided through the donor

agencies was four times greater than the same services provided by Community Based Organisations. The high price of delivery is largely due to the expensive and inappropriate procedures of donor agencies, to the enormous fees paid to expatriate consultants even where local engineers could provide better services, and to the padding of costs by global contractors – despite the pretence of open bidding.”

Reinforcing WSSCC Chairman Jan Pronk’s call to see the *Millennium Development Goals* as “a global common responsibility,” Gyawali also asks civil society in the industrialised nations to speak out on this issue: “It is the task of all ‘social auditors’ to speak out against the inefficiency and self-interest of donor bureaucracies. ‘Social auditors’ might include academics, students, investigative journalists, activist NGOs, public interest lawyers, or simply concerned individuals. If these people collaborate across the North-South divide, then they do have the power to influence both national and global policy.”

Attacking the problem from another angle, Umesh Pandey writes (page 44) that “If the big aid funds worked together they could use their influence ... to bring government into line with new approaches. In reality, the government is able to play the donors off against each other because they have not agreed a common set of principles.”

There are now signs that some of the world’s donor governments are beginning to respond. Parts of the aid programmes of Britain, Canada, Germany, Holland, Norway and Switzerland, for example, are attempting to support community-led approaches to water and sanitation. Funds from national aid programmes are also being channelled through the World Bank in support of community-led sanitation programmes in Bangladesh and India (including the efforts of the *SPARC/Mahila Milan/NSDF Alliance* (pages 18, 20, 24)). UNICEF has advocated and supported community-based water and sanitation initiatives for more than two decades, and has made a major commitment to school sanitation programmes (page 48).

But these are small and sporadic beginnings for an international aid effort that still offers most of its support to large infrastructure projects dominated by the expertise, exports, constructors and technology of the industrialised world – and to government projects and programmes whose relevance to the efforts of poor rural and urban communities is often marginal. More resources are certainly needed. But even the very significant increases in funding for the water and sanitation sector now under discussion by the World Bank and others will not turn the wheel towards the 2015 goals without a radical re-think of how these hundreds of millions of dollars are to be spent, what structures they will support, and whom they will benefit. The WSSCC believes that relatively modest resources – of the order of perhaps \$30 billion a year – could achieve water and sanitation goals if those funds were to be used in support of the community-based approaches that have already proved their potential.

Further, there is a danger that projecting a need for massive new investments (\$180 billion according to some estimates) will divert attention away from low-cost infrastructure for the poor and towards high cost infrastructure for the rich. On present patterns, a large proportion of any increase in funds is in any case likely to find its way to consultants from the industrialised nations and the international agencies who write the reports and proposals from the comfort of capital cities in Europe and North America. All this is a far cry from supporting partnerships between local government, civil society, NGOs, and communities. It is therefore a mistake to assume that massive increases in funds are the answer.

NGOs can pioneer new ways forward with a limited number of communities. UN agencies and aid programmes can bring to bear resources and international experience. But it is national and local governments – their priorities and policies, their attitudes and actions – that that will largely determine whether known solutions will be put into action on the same scale as the known problems. It is here that the battle of scale will be won or lost.

Yet there are those in government who have not been slow to see in the new approach – with its emphasis on community-led efforts, self-reliance, and ‘government as facilitator-rather-than-as-doer’ – an opportunity to absolve themselves of responsibility. For this reason, many contributors

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO?

have sounded a warning that the new approaches require more government involvement not less. “It is imperative for governments not just to go along with this, but to throw their full weight behind the effort,” says Shunmuga Paramisavan, *WaterAid’s* representative in India (page 34). “The sheer scale of the task demands their active participation, not their passive acquiescence.”

What has changed, in the view of most contributors, is that the primary action being demanded of governments is no longer the delivery of solutions or the subsidising of hardware. It is the facilitating of community-based action.

But what does this mean in practice? How can governments ‘enable’ and ‘support’ and ‘facilitate’ the new approaches?

For some years ahead, this is going to be perhaps the most fundamental issue in the struggle to achieve water and sanitation goals. And it is an issue addressed by most of the contributors to this report.

This introduction therefore concludes by drawing on what they have to say in order to begin suggesting some specific answers:-

■ **Listening:** The first and most often-stated suggestion is summed up by one of Nepal’s leading campaigners for water and sanitation (page 44):- “If the primary concern of government were meeting the *Millennium Development Goals* and improving public health ... it would be listening hard to all the good approaches being generated by the sector. And it would be taking a lead to form a more genuine plan of action.”

■ **Town and city planning:** In many developing nations, government could exert powerful leverage in favour of community-led initiatives by promoting legal recognition of slum and shanty housing and guaranteeing security of tenure. This will require bold town and city planning decisions, and determination to carry the day against dense thickets of vested interests. But many contributors would argue that for urban communities this would be a prerequisite and a catalyst of progress. In many towns and cities, the refusal of municipalities to support basic services like water, sanitation, drainage and garbage collection is based on the argument that such settlements are illegal and on the pretence that they are temporary. This undermines stability, confidence, and incentive – the essentials of a participatory approach to community-led development.

■ **Proactive roles for local government:** NGOs are limited in their number and outreach. And if community-based approaches are to lead the way in every poor urban and rural neighbourhood then the support, and in many cases the stimulus, will very often have to depend on local government. This may seem a Utopian idea. But there is no reason in principle, though there may be many reasons in practice, why local officials from health workers to sanitation engineers should not become catalysts and facilitators of community action. “Government must lead a campaign directed at its own personnel,” says Sait Damodaran (page 33). “People right down the line must be convinced that a new opportunity has arisen in which they have a key part to play.”

The difficulty of this task, and of orientating local authorities towards it, must not be underestimated. In many poor neighbourhoods, community organisations may not exist. And in some, as contributors working with dislocated urban migrant communities point out, even the very sense of community may be missing. In such circumstances, building institutions that can command the backing, the respect and the trust, of the whole population of a given area is a task to challenge even the best-intentioned of local authorities.

Clearly, this will not happen by default; central governments will need to instigate the change. “Municipal governments do not have the kind of skills and understanding demanded by the new approach,” says *WaterAid* Executive Director Ravi Narayanan (page 70). “Very often they are untrained, unfamiliar, and even unwilling to work alongside communities in the pursuit of people-led, locally-specific solutions. Any devolution of responsibility and resources must, therefore, be accompanied by a major effort to train and motivate people at the delivery end of operations. Without capable and committed municipal personnel, national government’s acceptance of the new approach will have no impact on the ground.”

■ **Social marketing:** Both national and local government could also make an altogether different level of contribution to the fundamental task of demand creation. They can insist, for example, that the major public institutions with extensive and sustained public outreach – schools and health centres and other civil institutions – should become learning and demonstration centres for good hygiene and its benefits. (To this end, UNICEF and the WSSCC have launched a ‘WASH in Schools’ campaign with the aim of promoting hygiene education and safe water and sanitation facilities in all primary schools.)

Beyond this, governments can also lead the way by training large numbers of local communicators and motivators, by developing media campaigns and well-thought-out and tested communications materials, and by sophisticated mass social marketing strategies.

At an even more fundamental level, government can also take the lead in breaking through the psychological barrier that so often isolates the hygiene issue from public debate. When asked how this has been achieved in South Africa over recent years, Minister Ronald Kasrils replies (page 60) “I think it really did come from political commitment and clarity of vision. The Government began to speak out openly about sanitation, which until then had been very much a Cinderella issue, lagging far behind water supply. People now raise the issue with me wherever I go. So the government has created this pressure for itself. And it was the right thing to do.”

■ **Helping meet demand:** There is no point in creating demand if it cannot be quickly met. And there is much that government can do to facilitate new approaches to supply. Local centres can be established for developing, testing, demonstrating, selling and maintaining affordable hardware. Regional and local governments can also encourage small-scale private enterprise to become involved in both creating and meeting demand for better hygiene. It can assist with start-up capital, tax breaks, and customs and excise exemptions; it can offer incentives for meeting targets, provide training and technical support, and subsidise marketing efforts as part of government efforts to create demand. Encouraged in this way, small neighbourhood or village enterprises can become involved in the long-term business of making and maintaining latrines, squatting plates, pit-liners, rain-water harvesting technologies, and water storage facilities. Once established, such village or neighbourhood level businesses may well, as Minister Kasrils points out (page 60), contribute to other poverty-reduction goals by helping to meet other basic needs by creating local jobs.

■ **Financing local action:** None of this is likely to happen if there is no local financial framework to make it possible. Government can help to create that framework by creative approaches to investments in water and sanitation – including revolving funds, subsidies for the most marginalised, bridge-financing for investments made by local governments, and by matching or guaranteeing funds for the encouragement of micro-credit and micro-savings schemes.

The logistical and risk problems of making credit available to large numbers of poor individuals or communities has in the past deterred both governments and banks from pursuing this option on any significant scale. But, to give one example, Shunmuga Paramasivan describes (page 34) how community organisations themselves can handle the administration of small loans if the initial finance is available. “Banks were reluctant to risk their funds on a sanitation project,” he writes, “But when the first bank came forward with a trial investment of 500,000 rupees, the villagers repaid the loans on time and without a single default. The Self Help Groups are now running simultaneous savings schemes and handling the loans of bank money to the villagers. When a family has demonstrated their commitment to build a latrine, they are eligible for a loan immediately.”

■ **Regulating the private sector:** Many governments are now embracing privatisation in water and sanitation services. But the delegation of function does not mean the abrogation of responsibility. Private enterprise, unregulated, will respond only to human need that is expressed as economic demand. There is therefore an obvious danger that privatisation will neglect the poor. “But government is in a position to lay down the rules and regulations within which private enterprise has to operate,” argues Roberto Bianchi, Director of the private Bolivian water company *Aguas del Illimani* (page 56), “and if it wants to, it can weight those regulations in favour of the poor.”

Similarly, government has a major role to play in the rapidly growing sector known as integrated water resources management (IWRM). But IWRM is in danger of coming to imply only large scale, heavily-subsidised projects of which the principal beneficiaries are industry, agribusiness, and the engineering and construction companies. It is the responsibility of government to develop an IWRM sector that is of, by, and for the poor rather than of, by and for the urban middle-class.

■ **Monitoring:** Community-led water and sanitation programmes need community-led monitoring and feedback. But it is the responsibility of government to monitor national progress – both to guide its own policies and investments and to fulfil its own commitments to achieve agreed goals. But in collecting national data, it is necessary to monitor not only how many people lack hygiene, sanitation and water supply but who they are, where they are, and why they are being marginalised. In this way, monitoring of disparity can assist in one of development’s most difficult tasks – the task of ensuring that the vulnerable groups – the very poorest, the women, the socially despised and the geographically remote – are not excluded from progress.

RE-THINKING

These are some of the ways in which government can facilitate community-led approaches. And there are signs that some governments are embarked on this process of re-thinking their strategic role in relation to water and sanitation goals. India, one of the poorest and most populous nations in the world, is developing a \$1 billion-a-year programme to try to support some of the many communities who are attempting to get on with the job of improving water and sanitation without waiting for outside support. The programme is not perfect and faces many problems. But what is encouraging about this example is the fact that political leadership shows signs of being willing to consider abandoning the role of expert and provider and to take up the role of supporting and facilitating community-based initiatives.

The State Government in West Bengal, for example, has been working in partnership with NGOs (principally the *Ramakrishna Mission*) and international agencies (principally UNICEF) in the development of a community-based sanitation programme (pages 25, 26, 27). Based on motivation and education rather than supply or subsidy, and piloted in the District of Medinipur (population eight million), the programme is backed by small loans and revolving funds. This has created an effective demand which is met in part by the encouragement of small-scale entrepreneurs who sell their wares in ‘Sanitary Marts’ of which there are now several hundred across the State. ‘Sanitary Marts’ are in fact a pulling together of many of the opportunities outlined above. They are hardware developers and testers, training centres for community motivators, sales outlets for sanitary ware and soap, after-sales service points, advice bureaux, and employment-providing focal points for the State’s efforts to reach water and sanitation goals. More than 40% of the population – in a State of approximately 45 million people – now has a sanitary latrine (if West Bengal were a country it would be one of the 20 most populous nations in the world). “In three or four more years,” says UNICEF’s Chandan Sengupta (page 27), “every family in the state will have access to safe sanitation. I believe that the basic strategy could be replicated across Asia and even beyond.”

THE WIDER POTENTIAL

Finally, it is necessary to draw out one other strand that runs through the contributions to these pages.

Sustained success in water and sanitation programmes, it has been argued, depends on catalysing real demand and real participation. But the kind of demand and participation that is insistent and organised, the kind that punctures passivity and summons up self-confidence, the kind that liberates community determination and resources, is equally relevant to every other problem of poverty and community development. And as one listens to the voices represented here, it becomes increasingly obvious that what is being discussed is a proposal for a new way of addressing not just the problem of water and sanitation but the problem of poverty itself.

Tsepo Khumbane (page 63) is one of many who feel strongly that the new approach has the potential to address the wider problem of poverty reduction. “If we were being sincere and true to the constitution of this country,” she writes, “the gearing up of sanitation would be a people-driven process. It would also be about empowerment and skill-building; it would support and strengthen women; and it would be seen as a major, sustainable, critical investment in the power of the country.”

Jockin Arputham, President of the *National Slum Dwellers Federation* (the largest people’s movement in India), points in the same direction (page 20) when he describes the effect of a successful community saving scheme in a poor urban community:- “Suddenly, things start to look possible. People are talking about a water point, a community centre, a toilet block. When you’ve got a savings scheme up and running, you’re starting to build the kind of community spirit, managerial skills and self-confidence that is required to tackle any slum development project.”

In other words, the apparently mundane task of working towards improved water and sanitation can, in the view of many contributors, become nothing less than a platform for community development. For some, it is also a means of challenging some of the most deeply-seated and damaging relationships and structures which lie close to the heart of the problem of poverty and underdevelopment

The contributions on the following pages amplify this discussion and offer further analysis and examples of the approaches that could advance the cause of water, sanitation, and hygiene world-wide. But all are aware that this is an approach for which, by definition, there is no single formula for success. The essential characteristic of the strategy discussed here is that it is decentralised and diverse. It is about trusting local communities, their organisations, and those who work with them. It is about creating space and building local capacity by providing the kind of support that does not undermine confidence or take away initiative. It is about being prepared to see mistakes being made without ‘taking control’. It is, from a traditional top-down perspective, diffuse and ‘unmanageable’. But these very considerable demands and difficulties are balanced by the potential rewards. For both individuals and communities, it is an approach that offers more than taps and toilets. It offers dignity, pride, and hope. ■

