

# **Sanitation and hygiene: approaches for sustainable development**

Summary notes of the short keynote presentation  
by Jon Lane, Interim Executive Director, WSSCC  
at the joint WSSCC/WHO seminar on sanitation, Stockholm, 12 August 2007

## **Overview of the current situation**

We have appointed ourselves to look after the planet and its people. At present, about half the planet is clean and about half is, literally, shitty: covered in millions of tons of shit annually by people who lack the dignity and convenience of basic sanitation facilities.

This is a world of two halves, a job half-done. Half the world's people have sanitation (collection, transport, treatment and disposal or re-use of human excreta, domestic wastewater and solid waste and associated hygiene promotion) and half do not even have basic sanitation (disposal of human excreta).

## **Four aspects of sanitation and sustainable development**

### ***Sanitation and health***

These are the main arguments used by sector professionals. They mainly concern the impact of sanitation and hygiene to reduce faeco-oral diseases. Remember, for example, that among under-fives diarrhoea kills five times more children than HIV/AIDS.

Remember also the British Medical Journal poll of its readers that voted sanitation as the greatest medical advance since 1840 – these people who voted are doctors.

### ***Sanitation and social development***

These are the main arguments used by poor people themselves. They concern privacy, dignity, status and convenience.

Perhaps the most important factor for social development is women's education, which in turn depends on sanitation and specifically the provision of girls toilets at schools.

People sustain their changed behaviours if they are motivated to do so, hence we implement sanitation by creating demand not by subsidising supply.

### ***Sanitation and economic development***

These are the main arguments that appeal to political decision-makers such as Heads of State and Finance Ministers.

WHO's recent studies suggest that \$1 invested in sanitation can generate between \$3 and \$30 (with an average of about \$7), mainly in economically-productive time saved by reduced illness.

Sanitation has big externalities: one person's lack of sanitation can adversely affect the economic productivity of many neighbours.

As with social development, women's education is also vital for economic development, and is another effect of sanitation. There is also a direct link between a country's improved infant mortality ratio (for which sanitation is one underlying factor) and improved gross domestic product.

### ***Sanitation and the environment***

This is a neglected connection.

There are externalities here also. One person's lack of sanitation can badly affect the environment of many others, notably by polluting their drinking water sources. We need to safeguard both surface and ground water sources as well as coastal waters.

Re-use of compost for agriculture is an environmental well as economic gain from sanitation.

The link between sanitation and the environment will become more important in the years ahead.

### **How to achieve our goals**

We need to scale up existing good ideas, not just support yet more pilot projects. We need to think about sanitation on a much bigger scale than in the past.

The estimated cost of \$10 billion per year to achieve the sanitation MDG target may sound big to us sanitation professionals, but it does not to other people. We need to win others over to our cause.

We have the technologies, the approaches and the people to improve the world's sanitation, and we can do it.

### **Our task this year**

These are internal activities within the sanitation sector.

We must analyse our work, get the science right, and agree the important points. Hence we need to agree a small number of important messages. (This seminar is part of doing this.)

### **Our task next year, in International Year of Sanitation**

These will be external activities communicating outside the sanitation sector.

We must throw our energy into advocacy. We must all use the same small number of messages. We must avoid internal splits and arguments, because this will be our one big chance.

If we get it right, we can achieve a whole planet that is clean, not just half.

Thank you.