

# Capacity needs for water and sanitation

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**Trachoma is an eye disease caused by poor sanitation and hygiene. Flies spread the disease in areas where people openly defecate. Trachoma can develop into trichiasis, which, without surgery, can cause blindness. In some regions of Ethiopia over 50% of the rural population is infected with trachoma, and over 5% suffers from trichiasis.**

People can easily prevent trachoma by washing their hands and faces regularly. Latrine construction and use can also prevent trachoma. Eliminating trachoma and other diseases caused by lack of clean water, sanitation and hygiene would improve people's well being, reduce costs of curative health care and help strengthen local economies.

Although the benefits are obvious and the remedy seems straightforward, reducing by half the number of people who lack sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015 – one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – is a formidable proposition in many countries. In spite of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) and the International Year of Sanitation in 2008, nearly half of the people in developing countries still lack access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. How can this be?

This issue of Capacity.org looks at the capacities that need to be developed in order for the water and sanitation targets for 2015 to be achievable. The main focus is on capacity needs at the intermediate and local levels, but links between macro-level policy making and local-level implementation are also addressed.

In the feature article, James Winpenny gives an overview of the capacity needs of local practitioners in the context of the institutional environment in which they work. Our guest columnist, Ravi Narayanan, also emphasises the importance of having a broad organisational and institutional approach rather than thinking of capacity development purely in terms of training people.

There is general consensus among policy makers at the international and national levels on the need for investments in water and sanitation. The challenge is to build institutional capacity to ensure that funds are allocated effectively through sector planning, budgeting and strategic financial planning. This is not an easy task, and the fact that donors do not adhere to the Paris Declaration does not help.

A recently published report by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) (see page 15) shows that only 29% of the European official development assistance (ODA) to the water sector in Africa is provided through budget support. The remaining 71% is channelled through separate

programmes and projects, often with their own programme implementation units. Mr. Abebe Ayenew of the Ministry of Water Resources in Ethiopia explains how the Ethiopian government is addressing this fragmented donor support.

But even those funds that are successfully channelled to the local level are not necessarily allocated to water and sanitation. Water supply usually ranks reasonably high on the political agenda, but sanitation and hygiene tend to get very little attention. This may seem odd, given the tremendous positive impacts sanitation and hygiene can have. But in most cultures these are very private matters. You need a clever strategy and well-developed communication skills to discuss with people where not to defecate and the advantages of washing hands. In her contribution to this issue, Shyama Ramani tells a story of a unique approach she applied in India to encourage people to use and maintain their lavatories. It takes courageous leaders to put sanitation and hygiene high on the agenda. Carmen da Silva-Wells, Patience Turyareeba and Brecht Mommen explain in their article how leadership, coordination and the willingness to learn are key factors of success in Uganda.

The importance of community participation at all stages of developing water, sanitation and hygiene has been long recognised. However, as Barbara van Koppen, Rudolph Glotzback and Jackson Wandera show in their articles in this issue, astonishingly little headway has been made in this respect. There is still far too much top-down planning that is often based on wrong assumptions about peoples' needs. Their articles give clear guidance on how to engage in genuine and effective consultations with the people concerned.

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