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The Case for Marketing Sanitation

Access to sanitation – the hygienic disposal of human excreta – has been largely achieved through the private sector supplying individual households. Evidence from what works indicates that development of the market is the only sustainable approach to meeting the need for sanitation in the developing world. This field note explains the marketing approach and suggests that it should be promoted as a central feature of sanitation improvement programs.



Tackling the millennium sanitation goal calls for fresh thinking and innovative approaches. Marketing sanitation, building on perceived benefits, offers a new approach to ensure that communities have access to safer services.

Why Market Sanitation?

Sanitation – the hygienic disposal of human excreta – is a basic human need. However, 2.4 billion people, or more than half the population of the developing world, still lack it. To halve that fraction by 2015 is a Millennium Development Goal. Millions of dollars in sanitation programs have made little impression, especially in Asia and Africa, where the shortfall is greatest. Most progress in access has been achieved by the market – private suppliers supplying individual households. The only sustainable approach to meeting the need for sanitation in the developing world is to support that market. Marketing has been more successful than anything else in changing the behavior of people when they can see direct personal benefits. The purpose of this field note is to explain the marketing

Health benefits of sanitation

Lack of access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene causes 1.6 million deaths a year, mainly due to diarrhoea and mainly among young children. Globally, diarrhoea alone kills more people than TB or malaria, and four times more children die from diarrhoeal disease than from HIV/AIDS.

There are three reasons to believe that more of this burden is due to poor sanitation than to a lack of water supply;

1. Various studies have concluded that the impact of sanitation on diarrhoea is greater than that of water supply;
2. The number of people in the world who lack sanitation is more than double those who lack access to safe water;
3. Sanitation helps to prevent other diseases, which are unaffected by water supply, such as intestinal worms.

approach, and suggest how it can be a central feature of future national sanitation improvement programs.

Benefits of sanitation

Improved health may seem to be the most obvious benefit of sanitation (see Box), but other gains are no less important. These include:

- Convenience and comfort
- Privacy and safety
- For women and girls, avoidance of sexual harassment and assault
- Less embarrassment with visitors
- Dignity and social status

Because of these other benefits, a large number of people – even very poor people – are willing to pay for basic sanitation.

Public and private dimensions

Sanitation involves products and services not only at the household level, but also for the community as a whole. These yield private and public benefits. The individual household's toilet is a private affair, and the household is usually willing to pay for its benefits. The other components of the system, such as the sewerage network or a pit emptying service, and the final treatment and disposal of the wastes, affect everyone and need public management.

This field note does not discuss public toilets. Though public toilets with an admission charge can be very successful as a business, they are not usually an adequate solution to households' sanitation needs. For example, they are usually



Many people in the world live without proper sanitation though they need it badly.

Photo credit: Kameel Virjee

locked at night and are not used for disposal of young children's stools.

If sanitation is so good, why don't people buy it?

The short answer is that people do pay for sanitation – in their millions – when conditions are favorable. For example, the figure below shows the changes in coverage with different sanitation technologies in Kampala, Uganda, from 1992 to 2003. It shows how the extension of coverage, mainly with septic tanks and pit latrines, has more than kept pace with the city's growing population, which nearly doubled in just over a decade. Indeed, the proportion of the population without their own sanitation (who have access only to a shared latrine or to none) fell from three quarters to less than half, although there was no major public

program to build or promote sanitation during that period.

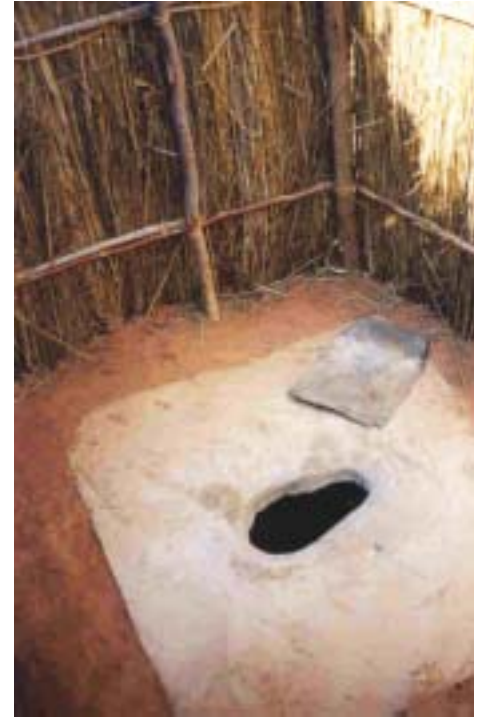
Nevertheless, many people in the world continue without sanitation, though they may say they want it badly. Why? One reason is that sanitation is most important to women and children, though it is men who make the investment decisions in many communities, and they may have other priorities.

Another is the conflict of interest between landlords and tenants. Landlords often consider it unnecessary to spend money installing sanitation facilities in their properties, if they are not compelled to do so. Poor tenants, with little bargaining power, may fear that if they invest in sanitation themselves, their rent may be increased or they may lose their tenancy, and hence their investment. Another reason is the frequent lack of good home sanitation information, products and services at any price.

Engineers, administrators and by-laws have also impeded sanitation when they prescribe technologies, such as waterborne sewerage systems, that are too expensive, not only for the poor but also for local governments.

The urgent need today is not for the same technology which is found in the industrialized world. For those who currently have nothing, a simple pit latrine or pour-flush toilet can be a major improvement in public health and far more likely to be affordable.

Other constraints to demand have arisen from imperfections in the market for basic sanitation. People's demand may be dampened by their previous unpleasant experiences with deficient sanitation – for instance when at school. They may underestimate the benefits and overestimate the cost of sanitation, or lack confidence that local tradesmen can provide a product of acceptable quality and



A simple pit latrine can be a major improvement in public health.

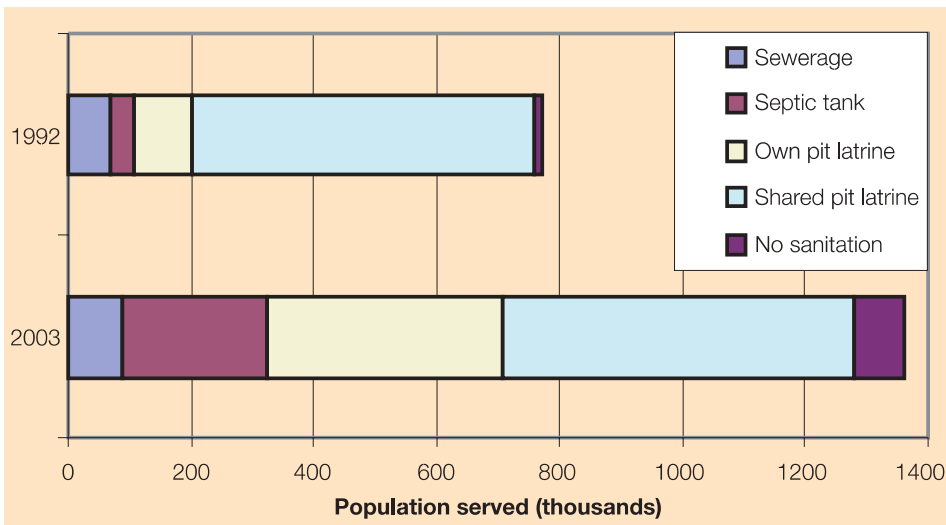
Photo credit: Lukman Y. Salifu

safety. For example, rumors of children falling into pit latrines are a powerful deterrent to installing one at home. Service providers also have often failed to offer people real choices with true costs that could meet their different needs. Instead, they have catered mainly for the relatively wealthy with toilet fittings designed for Conventional, waterborne sewerage.

What is social marketing?

Marketing consists of activities by which you reach customers and persuade them to buy and use a product or service. Marketing works on the principle of a voluntary 'exchange' between consumer and producer where both gain. Consumers get benefits they want and producers gain

Sanitation coverage in Kampala, Uganda 1992-2003



Source: Kampala sanitation master plan; Mott MacDonald for KfW

profits. *Social* marketing uses marketing techniques to serve social objectives (see box). Marketing goes far beyond mere advertising. It is often said to have four components, the four Ps; product, price, place and promotion.

What does marketing mean for sanitation?

Product. Latrine designs must respond to what people *want*, rather than what sanitary engineers believe they should have. In Mozambique, for example, the marketing of a new approach to sanitation began with many visits to existing latrines and consultations with their owners. This 'market research' revealed that most people were used to open-air defecation and did not want a superstructure, beyond a matting fence for privacy. Their greatest need was for a safe and affordable way of covering the pit. These findings led the government to develop a round concrete floor slab, which could be manufactured using simple equipment in local workshops.



Promoting sanitation involves communicating with consumers about products and services.
Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

Usually, a range of different products are needed to suit a variety of pockets and circumstances. The Mozambican program offered two sizes of slab, together with bricks to line the pit if necessary, and a latrine installation service.

Price. This is the hardest part of selling sanitation to those who lack it. The poor, who need it most, can least afford it. Hence the need to keep costs down and market a range of products with various price tags. For example, in one successful program in Bangladesh the cost of the latrines varied hugely, from an ingenious design using tin sheeting for the pour-flush pan and a flexible plastic tube for an odor-proof seal, which costs only Tk 15 (US\$ 0.30), to a cement version costing US\$500. For comparison, latrine projects elsewhere in Bangladesh typically offer a single model at a subsidized price; this limits the number of latrines that can be built to the size of the subsidy budget.

Place. The product must be delivered to the right place; in particular, a latrine must be installed in the customer's own home. This means that the supply chain has to reach every household. Sanitation programs in Lesotho, Benin and elsewhere have trained

What is different about social marketing?

Product: This may be a tangible item (condom, oral rehydration sachet, home toilet), a service (AIDS testing, pit emptying) or a practice (vaccinate children, wash hands with soap). Commercial marketers only want to sell the product; social marketers also want customers to use it correctly or behave differently.

Price: Commercial prices must cover all costs whereas social marketers might choose to subsidize certain items in order to reach the poor, who may also have social and other 'costs' to overcome.

Place: The product needs to be available to the target group, and public channels such as government outreach workers or volunteers, as well as private shops and artisans, can bring the market close to customers.

Promotion: Creating demand for a totally new product or service is more challenging than the commercial practice of winning market share from competitors.

local masons not only to build latrines, but also to do their own marketing.

In Mozambique, monitoring of the sales of the floor slabs showed that most purchasers lived within a few 100 meters of the pilot workshop, and so a handcart was provided which customers could borrow to bring their slabs home. The pilot workshop was then used to train artisans for other local workshops, each of which served its own neighborhood. In Malawi and India, 'Sanitation marts' have been set up as local 'one-stop shops' selling a variety of sanitation products and services.

Promotion. Promotion is communication with consumers about the product or service. This includes advertising, mass media, word of mouth, and anything in between. It can also include many other means to get customers' attention and convince them to buy the product: demonstration latrines, time-limited special offers, coupons and vouchers, competitions and prizes, door-to-door sales, credit sponsored by local traders, and mutual help schemes to help the poorest with the cost and the elderly with the digging.

Promotion using mass media is most effective when it is well researched, professionally designed, and followed up by other communication opportunities where consumers can learn more.

So why market sanitation?

First, marketing ensures that people choose to receive what they want and are willing to pay for. The last few decades have seen hundreds of thousands of toilets built in the developing world, often

with considerable subsidy, by government and non-governmental organizations. The impact of such programs has usually been very limited, because most of the toilets were not properly used or maintained. In other cases, very effective programs for small numbers of families have in some sense 'failed' because the number built was tiny, compared with the need.

A conventional subsidy-driven approach in Maharashtra State, India is considered a failure, despite its 'success' in building 1.5 million toilets. Subsequent surveys reveal that more than half of these have been abandoned or are being misused.



Improved sanitation can assign dignity and boost social status.

Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

Why do people want sanitation?

Asked to prioritize reasons for satisfaction with their new latrines, rural householders in the Philippines and Benin cited the following:

Rank	Philippines	Benin
1	Lack of smell and flies	Avoid discomforts of the bush
2	Cleaner surroundings	Gain prestige from visitors
3	Privacy	Avoid dangers at night
4	Less embarrassment when friends visit	Avoid snakes
5	Less gastrointestinal disease.	Reduce flies in compound

Note that health considerations are at the bottom of the Philippines list, and even further below – 13th place – on the list from rural Benin. Nevertheless, most government sanitation programs have stressed the health dimension. Private sector marketers would be more likely to discover, through their normal market research, that other factors were more important selling points.

A recent sanitation program in Benin used the following slogans:

“A beautiful latrine; privacy guaranteed for all the family”

“A latrine is better when you have visitors”

“With a latrine, no risk of snakebite”

Second, marketing is financially sustainable. Programs which provide sanitation at subsidized prices are constrained by the size of the subsidy budget, which usually falls far short of the need. Moreover, the subsidy is often captured by the better-off, who are better able to apply for it and spend it.

On the other hand, the private sector can make profits by selling sanitation products and services which consumers value and will pay for. Public funds can then be used more effectively for product development, market research, training, promotion and other forms of facilitation.

Third, marketing is cost-effective and can be taken to scale. Few conventional sanitation programs have built more than 10,000 latrines; and yet that is the minimum requirement for almost any major city in the developing world. This statistic shows that, with an average household size of six people, Kampala alone still needs ten times that number.

Marketing, on the other hand, has been successfully used by the private sector all over the world to sell all kinds of things from Coca-Cola to condoms. It's effectiveness is easy to monitor by measuring sales.

Fourth, provision of hardware is not enough. Sanitation facilities will bring few benefits unless they are used correctly, and this requires changes in behavior. With a marketing approach, sanitation only goes to those who purchase it, which makes it much more likely that consumers will understand its purpose and will value, use and maintain it.



Subsidized sanitation programs are limited by the size of the budget and tend to benefit only a few
Photo credit: Mvula Trust



Marketing has been successfully used by the private sector to sell all kinds of products, including sanitation ware.
Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

Role of the public sector

The marketing approach does not mean that government should relieve itself of the responsibility for sanitation and leave it to the local building trade. There is an important role for government – especially local government – in this approach, but it is very different from the commonly expected one of providing facilities and services.

The public sector must:

- Understand existing demand for sanitation, and what limits it;
- Overcome those limits, and promote additional demand;
- Stimulate development of the right products to meet that demand;
- Facilitate the development of a thriving sanitation industry; and
- Regulate and coordinate the transport and final disposal of wastes.

These five main activities are discussed below. There are several important implications of this shift. The public sector must talk to:

- Consumers
- Manufacturers/builders/installers of sanitation facilities
- Providers of supporting services, e.g. in emptying pits and septic tanks
- Other public departments, such as those responsible for urban land tenure, environmental pollution, small business development, etc.

Public resources for sanitation also need to be committed to:

- Research and development
- Promotion and advocacy
- Training and capacity building



The public sector has a vital role to play in coordinating final disposal of wastes.

Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

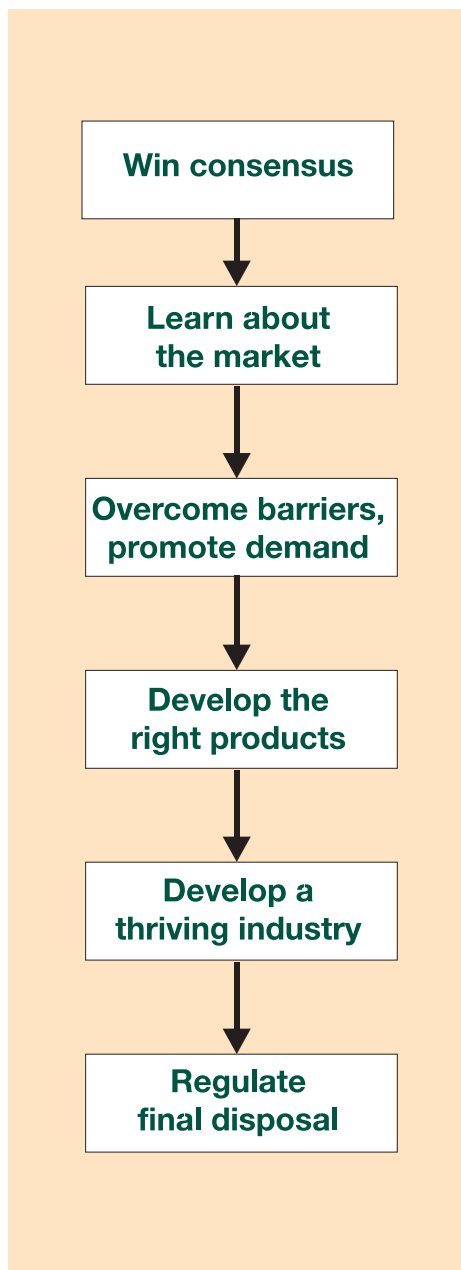
On the other hand public subsidies for latrine construction should be avoided if possible. If not avoidable, they should be kept as low as possible, and preferably used in ways that promote demand, and be consistent with a subsidy policy that is affordable at the scale needed to meet the full sanitation challenge.

For example, subsidies could be used to offer a low interest rate on loans for home improvement, or to exempt loans from administrative charges. Alternatively, a subsidy could be used for a limited-duration offer to attract attention to the launch of a new marketing campaign. Subsidies should never be applied in a way which undermines the existing private providers in the market.

Building a latrine is a major investment for many poor households, so consumer credit may be important. However, it should be used with caution, and kept to loans which can be repaid in less than a year. When the poor are lucky enough to obtain larger loans, they will have other priorities. Many micro-credit lenders offer loans only for investments which generate income, and that rules out sanitation. Lacking formal land tenure, the poor have no collateral, though some lenders use peer pressure or 'social collateral' through self-help groups to ensure loan repayments. A more promising use for credit is to support small businesses which provide sanitation facilities and services to the public, and wish to expand.

The process of marketing sanitation

The marketing approach can be summarized in this sequence:



Demonstrations can make it easier to market a product.
Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

1. Win consensus

The first step is to establish a policy consensus on the approach including a

policy on subsidies. This may be difficult at the national level, where the traditional approach of provision by government (or none) has been followed for years. It may

be easier to gain the enthusiasm and support of relevant agencies in one city, or in one or two regions of the country. Successful demonstration of the approach in one area will make it easier to extend to the country as a whole.

There must be at least one influential or committed person who is convinced that this is the approach to be followed, who can champion it and make sure that it happens.

2. Learn about the market

This means understanding both demand and supply. On the demand side, find out what people do at present to meet their sanitation needs, who helps them to do it, at what expense, and why. Learning requires visits to many existing latrines to observe their design and ask their owners why they are satisfied (or not) with them.

Conversations with residents and landlords of properties without sanitation will also explain why they have *not* invested in sanitation. Understanding supply means talking with existing latrine builders, pit emptiers and other sanitation service providers, which can yield valuable insights into their sales, costs and prices, and the constraints to increased demand and increased production.

Before the next step, check if the preliminary findings suggest any measures to make the business environment more favorable to the low-cost sanitation industry. For example,

- Do building regulations rule out cheap latrines?
- Are the necessary building materials

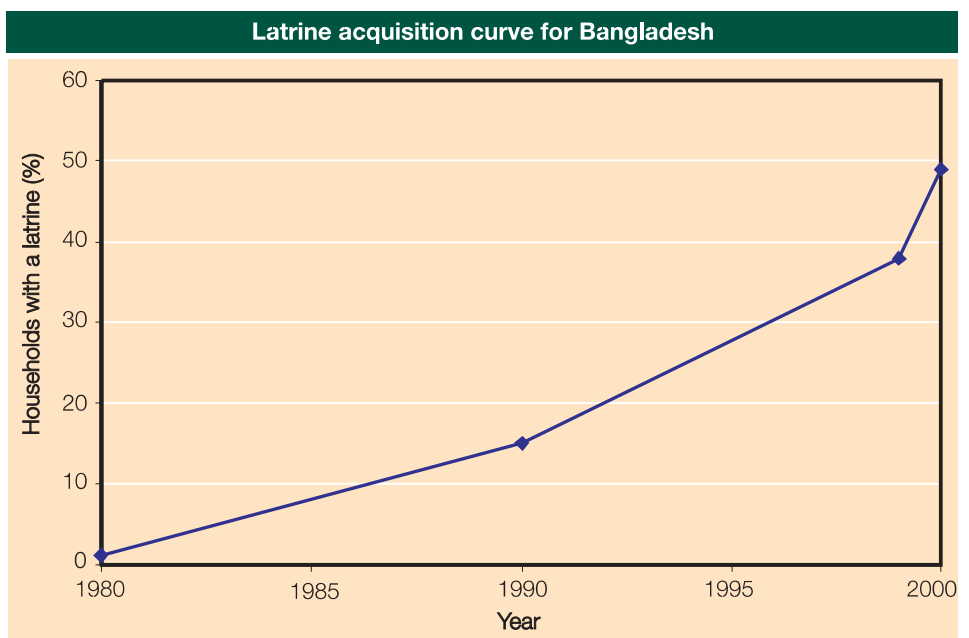


Direct marketing is effective in building demand for sanitation products.
Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

readily available in suitably small quantities?

- Does land tenure work to motivate or to deter intending purchasers?

Recent trends in coverage can be established by asking a representative sample of households with a latrine when they first acquired one. From their



responses, a retrospective 'latrine acquisition curve' can be drawn by plotting the percentage of households with a latrine (say) twenty years ago, ten years ago and one year ago on a graph like the example in the previous page.

The results of this enquiry can be used to help build consensus on the marketing approach, as they will almost certainly show:

- How little progress in coverage has been achieved by the conventional approach;
- That there is a dynamic market which is already meeting the needs of many poor people without any support from government;
- How a few simple measures taken by central or local government could remove constraints and help to develop the market further.

3. Overcome barriers, promote demand

Promoting demand for sanitation needs new forms of partnership between government – especially local government – and the private sector providers of sanitation services.

One step is to make existing regulation more supportive. Restrictive building regulations can be replaced by manuals on how to build various models of low-cost latrine.

Advertising is the best-known means of building demand. If mass media are used, an advertising campaign can be organized nationally, whereas production and sales are best organized locally. Where only a



Small scale producers play an important role in meeting demand for the local sanitation market.
Photo credit: Andreas Knapp

limited proportion of the population is reached by mass media, additional channels are needed, particularly word of mouth through local field workers.

In addition to advertisements, the public sector can help to overcome a lack of communication and trust between consumers and providers. It can build municipal latrine show parks, where local householders can come to view the different models available, learn the true price of each, read testimonials from satisfied owners, and be put in contact with reputable tradesmen able to install the model of their choice.

4. Develop the right products

The marketing system, not the latrine design, is the key to the success of any

sanitation program, but without appropriate products it will fail. Defecation is private and sensitive behavior; families are all different and need product choices that meet their different needs. Producers of sanitation are usually small scale builders, who operate informally and lack the capacity and resources to develop new products on their own. Government can afford to make this initial investment.

Top-down sanitation programs usually start with a sanitation technology which the promoters see as a 'solution' to a problem defined by 'outside experts'. This has often led to the promotion of technology which is unaffordable and inappropriate. Instead, it is wiser to make the effort to understand the problems experienced and defined by the poor, and then seek solutions which people need and want.

Developing suitable products requires a different approach from that adopted by most sanitation engineers. Instead of designing to a minimum specification, toilet products should be designed to a target price, for a market niche. If the design is too expensive, the technical specification needs revising so as to reduce the cost.

5. Develop a thriving industry

Building consumer demand will generate more 'pull' in the market. Measures to generate more 'push' include capacity-building through training, credit and other services for small businesses. Continuing research is also needed, to monitor the evolving market.

The interests of the public and private sectors are not identical. The first concern of the public bodies involved is to extend access to those who currently lack even basic sanitation. There is, however, no obligation on private providers to meet the needs of the poor if more prosperous households offer greater returns. Constant monitoring of the working of the market is needed to ensure that public efforts and resources invested in the sector continue to benefit the unserved, and not only the privileged.

6. Regulate waste transport and final disposal

Many low-cost latrine types are on-site systems, disposing of the excreta into a hole in the ground; these include pit latrines and pour-flush toilets. They are sustainable only if a new pit can be dug when the old one is full, or if a pit emptying service is available. Consumer studies (Jenkins 2004) have found that the limited lifetime of such



The private sector can provide affordable pit emptying services.

Photo credit: WSP-AF

latrines is an important constraint to demand for home sanitation.

In many cities, deficient pit emptying is a major constraint to the adoption and use of pit latrines, a cause of disease in those who undertake the task, and a major source of environmental pollution.

A case for public subsidy and regulation of the disposal of wastes outside the home can therefore be established. If coordinated to work well with the privately-provided home sanitation products promoted through marketing, this will make home sanitation more attractive, as

affordable pit emptying services extend the life of the household's investment.

Summary

In summary, the marketing of sanitation offers a whole new approach to ensuring that people get toilets. This implies rethinking the role of the public sector, so that it harnesses the power of the market and helps it to do its job. The market is the most suitable vehicle to get us to the millennium sanitation goal. Government needs to take the brakes off, oil its wheels, and of course, to steer it.

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WSP Field Notes describe and analyze projects and activities in water and sanitation that provide lessons for sector leaders, administrators, and individuals tackling the water and sanitation challenges in urban and rural areas. The criteria for selection of stories included in this series are large-scale impact, demonstrable sustainability, good cost recovery, replicable conditions, and leadership.



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