

Community-managed latrines

Part of a series of WaterAid technology briefs.

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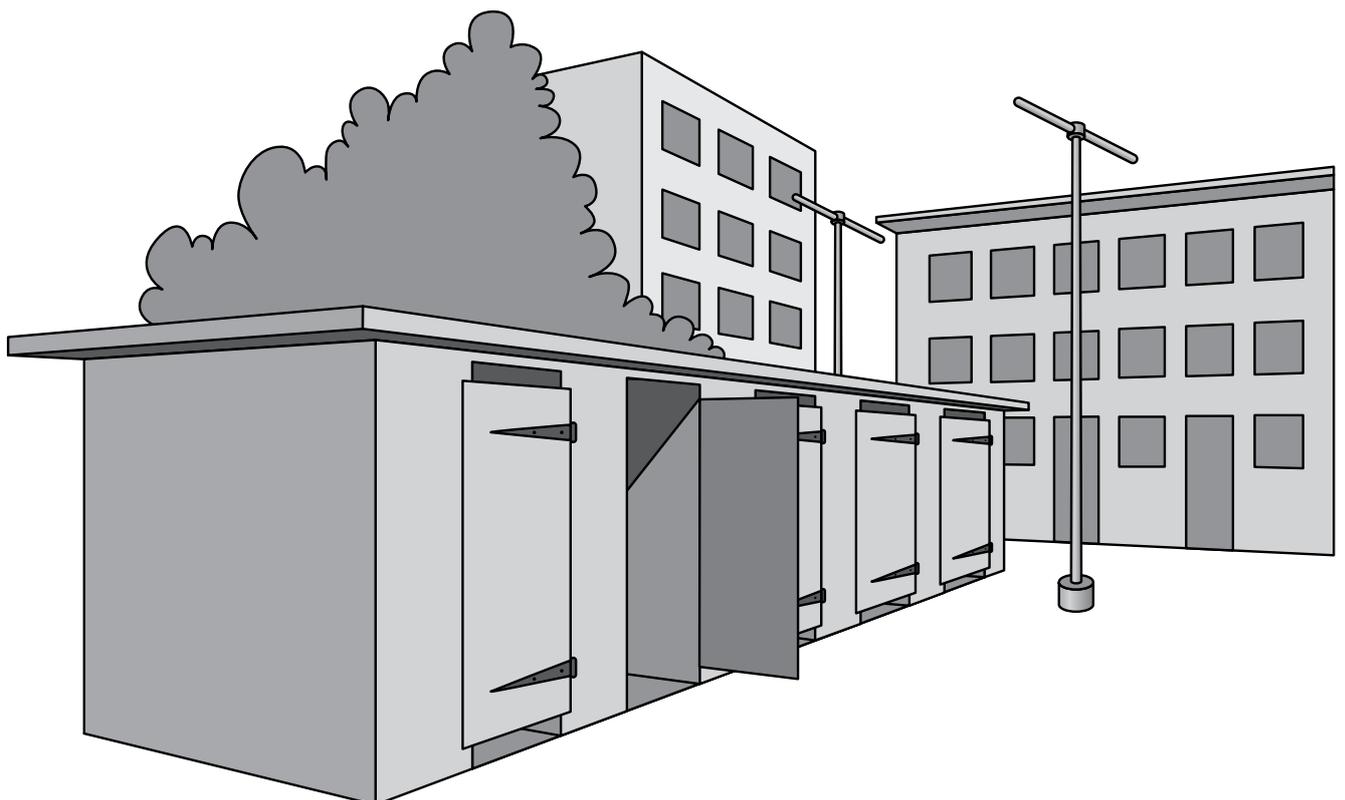
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Introduction

Community-managed latrines are technically very similar to individual latrines, except they are larger and serve a greater number of users. A range of sanitation systems can be used, including simple pits, pour flush latrines, urine separation and composting, as well as septic tanks and sewerage.

The main difference between individual latrines and community-managed latrines is in the way they are operated and maintained. Maintenance of household latrines is generally carried out by a family member, but for larger blocks of shared latrines the users will need to take responsibility for agreeing on a method to carry out maintenance tasks and then participate in its implementation. It is important that the maintenance method is acceptable to all users.

Fig 1: Urban community-managed toilet block



Schemes of this sort have been very effective where there has been strong community leadership and a real desire in the community to improve conditions.

In high-density population areas where properties have flushing toilets, it is sometimes possible to install a piped sewerage scheme. Advantages of this system include ease of use, acceptability, and a significant reduction in bad odours. However, disadvantages are the relatively high capital cost, construction difficulties in congested areas, and the disposal of the effluent at the end of the system. The topography of the area may well make or break this type of system.

Community-managed latrines should not be confused with public latrines, which are constructed in public places such as bus stations and hospitals for use by the general public, usually on a pay-per-use basis. Although there may be some overlap, community-managed latrines are generally for use by a smaller identifiable group of users.

Funding

Communities are typically encouraged to form a group to collect money to pay for construction. Capital costs (as opposed to running costs) are sometimes subsidised by external organisations or NGO-run credit schemes to make the project affordable; however, the community must have the capacity to fund and manage running costs, making capacity building within the community as important as providing the capital funding.

Design and construction

Any of the latrine designs discussed in the Household sanitation technical brief can be adapted for use in a community-managed system. Important design decisions include:

the best location for the latrines in the community; the number of seats to be installed; the facilities to be provided for women, children and people with physical disabilities; and arrangements for accessing water and electricity supplies (if lighting is to be fitted). Installing bathing and laundry facilities can also ensure that the unit is more widely used and valued. The community might require support with these decisions.

If tradesmen within the community have the necessary construction skills they can be employed by the community group. Otherwise the community group will need the support of an external organisation to employ a local contractor to carry out the work.

Key design issues specifically applicable to community latrines include:

- Separate facilities for men and women.
- Appropriately designed facilities for children and people with physical disabilities.
- Construction of the concrete floor – considering drainage and cleaning; disposal of grey water; need to construct floor in removable sections for access and maintenance if the design involves pits or pipes beneath the floor.
- Construction of the superstructure – this should be made from locally-available materials, eg bricks and mortar walls with a solid concrete or tiled roof, or wood with a reed or grass roof. Thought should be given to the likely amount of users per day as this will affect the number of units required. The superstructure should be well ventilated to remove odours, and have a low light level to discourage flies.
- Location – the latrine block should be situated at least 30 metres from

houses because of the odours generated. The location should be accessible and well lit so that users do not feel vulnerable after dark.

Guidance on the type of sanitation system required (eg pit latrines, septic tank) and design considerations should also be referred to.

Management and maintenance

Once the latrines are constructed, a community-elected management team takes over the running of them. The success of this process is critical to the sustainability of the project. Support is often needed in setting up the management system and starting to use and maintain the latrines. The management group will have to make important decisions concerning:

- Maintenance – should the group employ a caretaker or could households share responsibility for cleaning and maintenance?

- Cost – how much should be charged for use of the facility (money could be collected on a per visit basis or more usually on a daily/weekly/monthly basis)?
- Collection – who should collect the money and should the group open a bank account and register the community group?
- Access – should the latrine be locked with a key (or keys) held by the caretaker or by each household?
- Public or private – should the block be a public toilet and open for use of people from outside the community who pay for each use, or should it be a private toilet and only for the use of people from within the community who are part of the scheme?

Key factors to the success of the project are likely to be the motivation of the group, how well they know and trust one another, relative socio-economic status and their financial and organisational skills.

Satyendra Rao helps to keep the community-managed toilet block clean on a daily basis, Kaushal Nagar, India



WaterAid/Jon Spaul

Advantages of community-managed latrines

The advantages of a community-managed latrine system are:

- ✓ Service can often be provided to the poorest of the poor, and to people traditionally excluded from sanitation projects.
- ✓ Separate facilities designed especially for children or marginalised members of the community can be installed.
- ✓ They are ideal for areas where housing density is very high and space for individual latrines is limited.
- ✓ The capital and operating costs are shared between many households and therefore are lower than for individual latrines.

Disadvantages of community-managed latrines

The disadvantages of a community-managed latrine system are:

- ✗ They require a high capital cost.
- ✗ They require a high level of community organisation.
- ✗ The community may need help to organise fundraising and/or access financial support.
- ✗ Planning and construction often require input from skilled engineers and contractors, although local skilled and unskilled people can assist in construction.
- ✗ Poor organisation or lack of commitment may lead to unsatisfactory maintenance, conflict between users and disuse of the facility (which can become a health hazard if not cleaned regularly).
- ✗ Facilities created exclusively for the use of a particular community may cause resentment from neighbouring communities.

A note on hygiene

The risks of coming into contact with pathogenic bacteria are infinitely greater during the process of anal cleansing. A single soiling of hands during anal cleansing would afterwards spread millions of pathogenic cells into the environment. It is therefore vital to place handwashing facilities near to toilets.

An example of a basic handwashing facility is the tippy-tap – a plastic bottle suspended on a Y-shaped stick or string, with soap attached, that can be tipped over to pour out water without touching or contaminating the bottle (see www.tippytap.org).

Hygiene is discussed in more detail in our hygiene promotion series of technology briefs.

A note on equity and inclusion

Consideration should be given to access and ease of use by all in the community, including disabled people and children. The design for any latrine should be sensitive to both genders and local culture. Specific attention should be given to menstrual hygiene issues. Users with special needs should be provided with an opportunity to design their own adaptations for latrines.

References

Burra S, Patel S and Kerr T (2003) Community-designed, built and managed toilet blocks in Indian cities. *Environment and urbanisation*, vol 15, no 11. International Institute for Environment and Development. Available at: <http://eau.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/2/11.pdf>

Tilley E, Lüthi C, Morel A, Zurbrügg C and Schertenleib R (2008) *Compendium of sanitation systems and technologies*. Eawag/Sandec. Available at: www.eawag.ch/forschung/sandec/publikationen/compendium_e/index_EN

WaterAid India (no date) *Community managed toilets: understanding where it can work*. Available at: www.wateraid.org/documents/plugin_documents/communitymanagedtoilets.pdf

Useful websites

www.personal.leeds.ac.uk/~cen6ddm/CommunalSanitation.html
Links to articles, publications, reports and photos on community-managed sanitation blocks around the world, compiled by the School of Civil Engineering, Leeds University.

www.sulabhinternational.org
Sulabh International Social Service Organisation builds, operates and maintains public toilet facilities in India.



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