

Editorial

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) collectively comprise both a development priority and an enduring concern for individuals, communities and countries at all stages of development.

The reasons for this are multiple and frequently negative: spectacular outbreaks of disease and unremitting burden of background disease with their attendant human, economic and political costs; lack of investment towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets in the developing world, or in renewing aging infrastructure in more economically-advanced countries; and the looming threats from water pollution and scarcity driven by the converging forces of population growth, high and unsustainable consumption patterns, urbanization and climate change and variability.

Yet there is good reason for optimism. Despite falling behind on progress needed to achieve the MDG target – especially sanitation – more and more people have access to water and sanitation facilities every year; and in some counties progress has been made at remarkable rates. Over two decades, WaSH has moved from a political backwater to become once again a major issue in international policy and, year in year out, we see the benefits of human ingenuity – whether in technology innovation or development of new business, regulatory or financing models.

The availability and quality of evidence to understand these challenges and assess promising opportunities is extremely limited and worryingly inadequate given the enormity and importance of the associated challenges. This inadequacy is in itself a constraint to progress. Three examples illustrate the point. First, WHO and UN-Water recently released a global sectoral assessment report, the Global Annual Assessment of Water and Sanitation, or 'GLAAS'. Such a report is desperately needed to support policy development. Yet it is the first report of its type for at least 10 years (arguably many more) and is based not on a comprehensive assessment of all countries, nor even on a

systematic sampling of countries, but on the responses received from 42 self-selected countries from those approached for information, and similarly, 27 of 65 donor organisations. Secondly, similarly, we see no consensus and little real discussion on technology assessment that systematically accounts not only for 'laboratory' performance but also the realities in which the technology will be used in the field – despite evident need in fields such as Household Water Treatment and Storage (HWTS) and Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) where comparing alternatives objectively is urgently needed. Thirdly, assessment of the costs, health effects and economic benefits of WaSH interventions is relatively recent and while it has advanced dramatically in the last decade in terms of global studies, we still have extremely limited field information – and looking ahead financing information has not been systematically collected nor financing mechanisms evaluated.

This new Journal, the Journal of Water Sanitation and Hygiene for Development or 'JWaSHDev' is intended to contribute to the response to these challenges and in doing so will fill a critical gap in the literature and complement other journals from IWA and other publishing houses. We will encourage research and discussion on the constraints and opportunities to improve policy making and practice, with a focus on the development outcomes of WaSH services. We will seek a wide range of types of contributions – including (guest) editorials, short communications and papers on practice in addition to research papers and reviews. And in order to be a top international reference source, we have a commitment to ensure the highest quality publication.

Overcoming the very real barriers that limit authors from lower and middle income countries will be critical in achieving the goals of JWaSHDev. To reduce these constraints, we are establishing a mentoring group to assist the authors of promising papers; we will organize workshops and seminars on effective paper-writing, and the

Water Institute at UNC is offering an annual prize for the best paper from low and middle income country authors.

Among so much that is uncertain, one thing we are confident of is that relevant, credible evidence of sufficient quality contributes to improved policy making and practice – and through them driving better health and development outcomes.

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