

Sustainability News

Eight ways to improve access to water

1 Think beyond waste

Innovation can play a massive role in increasing consumer demand for sanitation systems, but we believe it can go beyond the toilet itself. We are nearing a tipping point between advances in health and technology, and the toilet is an invaluable tool in this. Health sensors, fertilisers, biogas – unlocking these business models can change the face of sanitation and the way we think about “doing our business”. I think we’re about to see what has happened with telephones over the last two decades happen with toilets.

2 Induce change through competition

The [Sanitation Challenge](#) is a competition for local authorities in Ghana. It was launched in November 2015 and we are in the second stage of the programme. The competition is leading to a shift in the priorities of the government, making sanitation more visible and important. Local authorities are excited about having the opportunity to decide what they think is needed in their area. An innovation prize that can be broadly defined as “a financial incentive that induces change through competition” is bringing changes at political level, as well as incentivising local authorities to identify new service delivery methods.

3 Go mobile

Mobile phones have made paying for services easier, with lower transaction costs. Small payment amounts make pay-per-use more affordable for low-income populations as well. It is only one small piece in the puzzle, but it has opened up many opportunities.

4 Make toilets a hyper-local marketplace

We also create the toilet blocks to be a hyper-local marketplace – users can recharge their mobile phones

Private entrepreneurs have to be encouraged to use unique business models which make toilet services an experience to remember, and a routine that attracts people to use them. For example, access to our toilets is free and they have all the basic facilities – sufficient lighting, ventilation, wash basins, soap dispensers – and we use stainless steel so the blocks are shiny. We also create the toilet blocks to be a hyper-local marketplace – users can recharge their mobile phones. Just think of the incentives that would be created if people had access to a free Wi-Fi hotspot at a public toilet.

5 Involve communities

It is critical that people accept the water and sanitation solutions that are installed. Even in Europe, there is great resistance to the idea of using faecal sludge on agricultural land. Involving communities in the design and choice of technology is key to ensuring that the result is what users want. One great example is from Paraguay, where communities helped to select the technology and the design of the facilities to ensure they met their values. This is a long process and requires investment in the construction and participatory processes, but considering the current low sustainability rates of many Wash [water, sanitation and hygiene] investments, it will pay off in the long term.

Analysis How do you solve a problem like a broken water pump?

Long considered a symbol of development aid, up to 40% of handpumps in sub-Saharan Africa are broken at any one time. Technology is offering smart solutions

6 Create standards for innovation

If we want to promote sanitation as a sustainable utility service, it is important to come up with more standards for technologies and services. The [International Organization for Standardization](#) is developing a new standard for non-sewer sanitation systems that kill pathogens. The standard provides guidelines for the industry to develop new technologies, and can help countries shape their policies and promote the best systems.

7 Keep your audience in mind

Innovation can be done in different ways but it should be focused on the key audience for the right reasons and for the right end value-add. This might be around working on aid effectiveness, scaling action in supply chains, focusing on marginalised communities, hygiene behaviour, water stewardship, capacity building or working with the private sector – a whole number of things. It can take longer but buy-in is greater in the end.

8 | Accept and share failures

We need to have a cultural attitude that supports innovation. This also means that we have to accept failures when new techniques don't live up to expectations and share these lessons. This should not be an excuse for ill-considered experimentation, however, as the stakes are high.