



13th WEDC Conference

*Rural development in Africa
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DISCUSSION GROUP REPORT

Operation and maintenance of sanitation scheme
and stormwater drainage

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The discussion started with a description of the Malawi urban sanitation programme which has attempted to meet the particular needs of the low income urban people. The Sanitation Centres are seen as a key element in the delivery of improved latrines. So far there have been 200,000 recorded visitors to the various sanitation centres with 500 sanitation plates or slabs sold. It was felt that there must be components of the sanitation system for sale at the demonstration point as otherwise people's raised expectations would be thwarted.

There was some discussion between the Lesotho and Malawi delegates as to the size of squat holes and preferences for sitting or squatting. It was reported that an individual's squatting position depended on the degree of flexibility of their achilles tendon, but as for as each individual this remained constant people soon learn where to position themselves on the foot rests.

The implementation of sanitation programmes in rural areas was then discussed. This brought out a difference of opinion as to whether we should be planning organised programmes with subsidies and credits and field staff or whether rural work could be seen as a natural extension of the urban work with very simple Sanitation Centre demonstration units. The role of Village Health Committees and the use of Ministry of Health Inspectors as facilitators was also explained.

The consensus reached was that we must be prognostic - realising that there are things the people can afford and that they can choose themselves according to their own affordability and desires. The role of the sanitation expert must be to demonstrate technologies which people understand and which require a minimum of maintenance. Sanitation must be adequate to local situations, cultural acceptability is vital. We should improve existing facilities not impose new ideas. We have to go as equals not as lecturing experts.

With regard to the technical side of operation and maintenance, it was recognised that where digging a pit costs only K5 and land is not a constraint then redigging every twenty to thirty years is preferable. However, where there are particular ground conditions such as in Lesotho where expensive lined pits having a life of around five years then desludging must be the answer.

The group finally considered the need for adequate drainage. Stormwater was not seen to be a significant problem from the health point of view but sullage water required extra care. The use of appropriate soakaway pits on sites and services schemes in Malawi was strongly endorsed by the group.