



A Thematic E-Discussion
hosted by SuSanA India
Chapter and India Sani-
tation Coalition

Case Studies Are Signposts For Recognition And En- couragement

Case studies are an important tool of qualitative research but need to be prepared and used with care. This thematic discussion examines what constitutes a case study, how they can be collected, validated and distributed, and how they can help scale up projects



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1. Introduction

The SuSanA Indian Chapter and the India Sanitation Coalition conducted a three-week thematic e-discussion on **Case studies are Signposts for Recognition and Encouragement**. The purpose was to elicit comments and examples about case study research to support and scale up sanitation work.

The case study method of research has been criticised for its lack of rigour and the tendency for a researcher to have a biased interpretation of the data. Case studies have a small sample size that calls into question reliability and generality. This method is sometimes dismissed as an exploratory tool. However, it remains popular particularly in studies of real-life situations governing social issues and problems. Case studies are also widely reported in literature. They continue to be the darling of the development sector to illustrate success (but not so much, failures or challenges).

Case studies are important building blocks of knowledge management and the endeavour has been to examine individual cases of good practice in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector, validate the cases from various sources by collecting empirical evidence, provide a holistic in-depth investigation in to the case and draw learning lessons. The lessons from each case provide interesting insights for scaling up as well as replication in other geographic locations having similar issues.

There appears to be a hierarchy of case studies. These start from examples to avoid, to neutral, to those seen as desirable. The value judgements are ascribed for their process, players and outcomes. A document by the Food and Agriculture Organization shared on SuSanA (<http://forum.susana.org/media/kunena/attachments/123/GoodPracticesTemplateFAOSept2016.pdf>) suggests templates for just two kinds: good practices and promising practices.

A good practice is one that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience that has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, has been repeated and deserves to be shared, so that a greater number of people can adopt it.




A promising practice has a narrower definition. It is one that has achieved a high degree of success within a single setting, and the possibility of replication in the same

Any study that captures a principle leading to achievement of desirable and sustainable outcomes at scale in a short period of time can be a case study

setting is guaranteed. It has generated some quantitative data showing positive outcomes over a period of time. A promising practice has the potential to become a good practice over a period of time but does not yet have the research or replication to support wider adoption or upscaling. As such, a promising practice incorporates a process of continuous learning and improvement.

The [India Sanitation Coalition](#) is working on assimilating case studies on sanitation. It has developed a process for seeking these from its members, screening them and adding those selected to its database. The purpose, as is evident from the foregoing, is to help others with practical examples.

This discussion on case studies sought to understand the following:

1. What is a best practice/case study? Who qualifies that? Can we use an alternate terminology for this kind of research. **Girija Bharat, Director, Mu Gamma Consultants Pvt Ltd.**, led this topic that was open for comments from 21-26 April 
2. How should these case studies be collected in an efficient way, who should validate them, and what are the best possible ways of an extensive dissemination and its use for replication. **Aprajita Singh from PSI** led this topic. That was open for comments from 27th April to 4th May 
3. What are the current gaps in the learning for different stakeholders and how can an approach based on well-documented case studies help in bridging this? How can it help in scaling up pilots, as India has many successful pilots of which only a few ever get replicated and scaled up? What can be the most profitable “produce to use” strategy for case studies? Which kind of knowledge products find utility with different stakeholders? **Robin von Kipperluus from World Bank** led this part of the discussion from 5 – 12 May 

2. Defining the scope of case study research: What is a case study

Posts: 15

Running from 21-26 April 2017

The first topic of this thematic discussion on case study research dealt with defining what a case study is. The topic's moderator Girija Bharat said case studies are investigations, in that they are based on knowledge and experience and involve the collection and analysis of



data. They take an in-depth look at the issues. They provide insights into how something takes place. To be meaningful, she said longitudinal studies are necessary. However, field staff often find it hard to understand what a case study is. It could be the normal, every-day activities of a project, or the extra-ordinary. Hence, the need to demystify case study research so field staff can participate. She sought comments on the following:

What is a best practice / case study? Who qualifies that? Can we use an alternate terminology for this kind of research?

Nipun Vinayak responded by saying any study that captures a principle leading to achievement of desirable and sustainable outcomes at scale in a short period of time can be a case study. Capturing principles may be more important than capturing a practice. He gave the example of the practice of sustaining ODF. The set of activities to sustain ODF would be more important than the distinct practices. The underlying principles include

- Leadership and initiative by a champion
- Fostering collective spirit – only group sports were chosen to further consolidate the ODF community and enhance their team spirit required for sustainability
- Positive discrimination and enhancing competition, by disallowing non-ODF villages from participating
- Flexibility to the district to take decisions
- Productive engagement of village-level motivators in people engagement activities (and not bureaucratic work alone!)

However, in the same example, individual practices would include ODF Olympics, walks of pride, award ceremonies, etc.

Alka Palrecha reiterated case study research is a method in social science research used for building and testing theories. Their biggest contribution is in communication i.e., dissemination of 'good' and 'bad' practices. Value judgements can be attributed only in hindsight, a limitation of the case study approach. The exemplary value needs to be explained for justifying the choice of the case. A clear line of discovery of the case normally will assert its value.

Case studies are useful when the researcher aims to study the dynamic relationship between rationality and power; in planning and, more generally, modern democracy at work; tell a story that will elicit critical thinking and action on the part of readers; and look at planning (or any other disciplines) from a novel perspective.

Abhishek Mendiratta remarked too often case studies are written up to satisfy a donor, or make an organization look good. Effective case studies need to be written up honestly.

Elisabeth van Muench reiterated this, and brought up SuSanA's earlier work on case studies that are available at this URL . A template for SuSanA's case studies is

available at www.susana.org/en/resources/case-studies/details/2259.

This has a section 11 on Practical experiences and lessons learnt. The important thing is to share the good and the bad so others can avoid making the same mistakes. The template has a section on long-term impacts. However, as people write about their own projects, again it might be hard to stay objective and neutral.

Srinivas Rao Podipireddy defined a case study as a place where a best practice has been tried and tested and delivered the intended result. Further, the result has been to be sustained in a given conditions. What is important is 'what best practice was followed to achieve what'. A best practice is also about optics – demonstration /visibility is important. Perhaps, that is a condition for choosing a best practice to showcase for scaling up.

Robin Van Kippersluis felt an important component of a best practice is something that has worked in different settings - and hence offers opportunities for replication at scale. Lessons can be drawn from both quantitative and qualitative research and every-day challenges, but are not necessarily all captured in case studies. They are also not necessarily tested to work in different settings.

Failures also yield lessons on 'how not to do something'. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched the [Swachh Sangraha](#) portal where local lessons and solutions on sanitation can be found.

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Under SBM, said Sujoy Mojumdar, case studies demonstrate innovations in implementation that are generally context-specific, and those reporting initiatives taken up by implementing agencies. Both have an inherent bias but lessons are sometimes useful and can be taken up by others. Few have critical conclusions and these are discouraged. They do not give results of evaluations which can be used for learning and course correction.

3. How can case studies be collected, validated and disseminated efficiently

Posts: 8

Running from 27th April to 4th May 2017

Aprajita Singh, the topic's lead, stated this was an extension of the discussion. This topic covered to how to collect, validate and disseminate case studies. Suggesting

the CPSL framework: Collect, Produce, Share and Learn, she explained how it applied for organizations and the entire sector.

Organizations could have a central repository for case studies. Teams preparing them could share them with those who could amplify them and also with partners or donors. At the sector level, networks and platforms could integrate knowledge. SUSANA, the ISC Best Practices Task force and the SBM best practice online repository are some examples of this. For dissemination, she gave the example of the launch of the compendium at a major sanitation event.

The CPSL framework was also adopted by the Best Practices Taskforce of the India Sanitation Coalition. It adopted multiple approaches to collect which included call for submission which was promoted through the website, social media, broad web search, reaching out to individual partners, etc. These were then distilled through and those that qualified as a best practice/good practice were shortlisted and produced as short case studies that can be easily read and understood. The dissemination strategy included the launch of the compendium at a major sanitation award.

She invited further thoughts/responses on these broad questions:

How should these case studies be COLLECTED in an efficient way, who should validate, and what are the best possible ways of an extensive disseminated and its use for replication? Also, examples from participants with comments on how to collect validate and disseminate.

Nitya Jacob responded asking participants for practical examples such as getting project staff to write or co-author case studies with research people. This could give a practical twist to what can otherwise become an academic exercise. One example emerged from the India Sanitation Conclave where a compendium of best practices was released.

Sunetra Lala responded saying it is desirable to get practitioners or project staff to collect case studies and write them up. This hones their skills in a new area. Several papers have been co-authored by a researcher and project coordinators or officers that have been accepted by WEDC as an example of such collaboration. Government officials can also be co-authors. For validation, case studies can be referred back to the field or circulated to experts for comments. To disseminate them, she suggested looking at the purpose and then deciding the medium.

Siddhartha Das however felt only experts who have the understanding of the sanitation situation in India should collect case studies to ensure quality. This should be immediately followed by validation to keep the case study relevant. He felt the adaptation and replication of the case studies by organisations/groups/individuals is a weak link in the chain because of a lack of proper know-how on ways of replicating.

Robin von Kippersluis, who is the lead for the third topic, asked Siddhartha if the way a case is captured had a bearing on for its replication. Often, case studies lack advice on how to be replicated. Case studies could build in practical lessons and recommendations that could be drawn if others want to replicate this approach.

V. Kurian Baby said a case study was a mirror capturing all key elements, of a project or programme, both quantitative and qualitative. Project teams were seldom good at documentation and by the time the project was noticed and discussed, many of the subtle elements that were critical for its success or failure would have been forgotten.

Project teams change, eroding institutional memory. Documentation experts may not fully understand the nuances and other underpinnings. Therefore, case studies could turn out half-baked. He suggested starting case study documentation at the ideation and conceptualization stage and running concurrently with the project's execution.

How can trusts, foundations, multi- and bilateral agencies be galvanised to share reports of their projects that contain a wealth of information

Notes from project staff would be valuable and these could be shaped professionally by experts. Validation could happen periodically by a core team of the implementing staff. Best practices are always adaptive, contextual and creative.

4. What can we do to promote the use and replication of good sanitation lessons and practices

Posts: 10

Running from 5 – 12 May, 2017

Robin von Kippersluis, the moderator of this topic, posed the question: What can we do to promote the use and replication of good sanitation cases, lessons and practices? There is so much knowledge of what works on sanitation and what not that they need to be validated and the lessons used for replication. He asked for examples, how they can be organized and used for replication, and finally, who should be responsible for replication.

He asked for an example of a sanitation case or lesson from one district, village or State that has been successful.



fully replicated in another district, village or State in India? If so, what were the success factors?

When cases are organized in priority areas or topics, we may better understand which gaps there are in our collective knowledge and learning on sanitation. This can allow for 'mapping and gapping'. How could this work in practice?

The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched Swachh Sangraha which contains a growing number of cases and lessons. There are many cases worth a look, for example [this story from Bijnor](#). How could this portal be used in your view to support replication? And who should be responsible for replication?

Rashid Kidwai said case studies document work done to share the lessons with others. Case studies can be about good and bad experiences. He posed the question: How can trusts, foundations, multi- and bilateral agencies be galvanised to share reports of their projects that contain a wealth of information.

Positing that the India Sanitation Coalition could arrange a competition of such organisations to get the best, this would ensure participation and bring to the fore smaller organisations in sanitation.

Bijnor, Robin said, is an example of a case study documenting a success. It is available at the MDWS website at [this link](#).

Nitya Jacob provided the example of the Swami Vivekanand Youth Movement, an NGO working on health issues in Karnataka, that had a successful WASH in Schools programme in Mysore's HD Kote taluk. After successfully covering all the schools in the taluk it replicated programme to the schools of Raichur taluk in Raichur district. SVYM had a person-centric approach that takes time but yields long-term dividends.

For 'gap analysis', it would be useful to have a framework in which case studies can be fitted. For dissemination, there are several sites and mailing lists. ISC, MDWS, Hindi Water Portal are some. Any organization working on sanitation should be responsible for replication. NGOs, donors, the government and companies.

Atul Bakshi gave the example of the Satya Bharti Abhiyan, the sanitation initiative of Bharti Foundation. Its mandate is to work on sanitation in rural Ludhiana district and provide a toilet to every household, ensure a girl's toilet in all government schools, behaviour change to improve sanitation conditions and implement the Abhiyan without taking any funds/ resources from the government or the beneficiary.

It is funded by the Bharti group of companies. So far, 17,628 toilets have been made benefiting 86,000 people. He gave details of the process of stakeholder engagement adopted by the Foundation. Cases could be organised into priority areas to better understand the gaps. He agreed the MDWS website merited a close

look to assess what could be replicated.

Ajit Seshadri suggested a case study could assess the need and make a list of sustainable practices. One yardstick was to see how projects had performed in one year, three years and five years. He suggested four areas for case studies:

1. On-site sanitation in rural / semi urban / decentralised mode
2. In an OD site how sludges are safely disposed/ utilised upon safe co composting
3. Reuse of waste water for secondary purposes
4. Apt community awareness and their reciprocal participation and eagerness in propagation in other communities.

Put together, these constituted a successful case study.

Prithvi Simha said sanitation isn't simply about providing people access to a toilet. Provisioning does not end with user access to the interface. Irrespective of the system model in place, sanitation needs to extend beyond the toilet and be able to connect users to a service chain that provides adequate treatment.

Providing the case of source-separating sanitation systems to highlight this, he said two stakeholders are of particular importance:

- a. Consumers – stakeholders that need to be motivated to use urine-diverting toilets and consume urine-fertilised food. Consumers are vital, since the initiation of a closed-loop sanitation cycle through source-separation begins in households
- b. Producers (Farmers) – stakeholders among whom interest, motivation and acceptance of source-separated human wastes as a fertiliser must be created, developed and sustained over time.

When replicating source-separation based sanitation systems, surprisingly, we don't have best practices on implementation figured out when it comes to the farmers. A study in south India shows that 'trust' could be a key variable that determines the proliferation potential of new sanitation practices.

Farmers in the study region (Vellore) trust and value the opinions of people they know, people to whom they are related or people with whom they have been socialising and interacting over the years.

5. Conclusion

The discussion brought out the importance of case studies as a means of recording qualitative, in-depth information. Even though they attract criticism of not being rigorous, replicable, scalable, etc., case studies are important research tools.

The government and various organizations including the India Sanitation Coalition are actively collating and

disseminating case studies to guide sanitation programmes. Several companies have done noteworthy work and their examples were shared by participants, though these barely scratched the surface.

What was missing were case studies from government programmes. Many ODF districts and states have achieved that distinction on the back of efforts from the administration. Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are some examples. While there are some sources with how they

6. Further Reading

[So what did they leave on our break \(video\)](#)

[Kachre se Kamal](#)

[FAO good practices template](#)

[SuSanA best practices](#)

[SuSanA case study template](#)

[SuSanA projects database](#)

[Failures of water supply and sanitation systems](#)

[Farmer attitudes and perceptions to the re-use of fertiliser products from resource-oriented sanitation systems – The case of Vellore, South India](#)

[Bijnor District adopts novel innovation to monitor sanitation](#)

[Open defecation free project – toilets for all, nightmare for villagers](#)

[Watch how Unilever is helping improve access to toilets in Rural Bihar](#)

[India Sanitation Coalition best practices task-force](#)

did it, these are scattered and hard to find.

The Government of India is trying to put these together in the Swacch Sangraha section of its website. Pooling efforts from the Coalition and SuSanA, this could become a valuable repertoire of case studies in the near future. It can help overcome several of the shortcomings brought out in the discussion.

The [Sustainable Sanitation Alliance \(SuSanA\)](#) is an open international alliance with members who share a common vision on sustainable sanitation and are dedicated to understanding viable and sustainable sanitation solutions.

It links on the ground experiences with an engaged community made up of practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and academics from different levels with the aim of promoting innovation and best practices in policy, programming and implementation.

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7. Contributors & Bibliography

The following contributors made one or more posts on the forum during the current TDS. The contributors are listed in alphabetical order.

NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR	ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Girija Bharat (first topic lead)	Mu Gamma Consultants Pvt Ltd	India	MDWS 2010: From Dreams to Reality. Compendium of Best Practices in Rural Sanitation in India, available at http://www.mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/WSP_Compendium_Press_28Oct2010.pdf
Abhishek Mendiratta		India	
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Alka Palrecha	People in Centre	India	
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Sujoy Mojumdar	UNICEF	India	
Sameer Jain	Active Allocator	India	
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Sunetra Lala	SNV Development Organization	Cambodia	
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Meena Narula	Water for People	India	
Rashid Kidwai	India Sanitation Coalition	India	
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