To let or toilet?
Is that the question?
The hidden challenges of selling sanitation

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INTRODUCTION

Many of us have stayed in rental housing at one time or another, either paying the rent ourselves or as guests of those who are. As a student I have fond memories of sharing a rented apartment with five others. While we got along well keeping the house clean was a perpetual challenge, with attitudes towards the washing up being particularly contentious. To get round common disputes over the dirty dishes, one of us proposed buying a dishwasher. The problem was that a dishwasher was a significant investment and we did not own the house. When we went our separate ways, selling the machine might be difficult and taking it with us was impossible. Asking our landlord to buy one was complicated - he worked through an agent and we thought he may raise the rent in return. One of us was unsure they wanted to contribute at all.

Our debates about washing the dishes may seem odd as an introduction, but I trust you can relate to them. Sadly such (ultimately trivial) dilemmas are echoed time and again in a much more serious context – plaguing many of the 600 million urban dwellers estimated to lack adequate sanitation worldwide (JMP).

Sanitation provision within households is widely viewed as a private matter. As the UN's Water and Sanitation Task Force have noted *"sanitation coverage often starts at the private level and depends largely on investment and behavioral decisions made at the household level, often entirely outside of government"* (UN, 2004). Many decisions are made like this, from whether to buy a mobile phone to whether to invest in a dishwasher. The challenge with sanitation is that it has strong public good elements; governments have for many years encouraged households (through persuasion or compulsion) to invest in better sanitation and adopt more hygienic practices.

As the Task Force also noted *"achieving the MDG target for sanitation is as much a matter of unlocking demand at the household level as it is of increasing supply"* (UN, 2004). Two in-vogue sanitation approaches highly recommended by the same Task Force seek to do just this – these are sanitation marketing (where better ways are found to market and deliver sanitation goods and services) and community-led total sanitation (where communities are urged to become 'free of open-defecation' and often rewarded for doing so). Both seek to unlock demand by 'selling sanitation' – the first in a more market-driven way, the second by provoking shame and disgust with current practice and working through community networks and peer pressure to generate change. Households are urged to make sewer connections, or more often, invest in new or better latrines.

This focus on creating demand is not new. Back in 1992, WHO's comprehensive guide to low-cost sanitation put great emphasis on the need to stimulate demand amongst households and communities; *"a valid approach to the promotion of latrines is to consider them as products to be marketed to individual households using all the skills of the advertising and marketing industry"*

(WHO, 1992). The challenge is that wanting better sanitation is one thing; actually acquiring it is another issue entirely. Many pitfalls lie along the way, as my housemates and I discovered when debating the purchase of a dishwasher.

For those selling sanitation, the question of 'whose land is it anyway?' is particularly pertinent. Our rented house was not our 'land'. A similar dilemma arguably faces the many hundreds of millions of urban and rural people that either live in houses that they do not own or on land that is not theirs. Indeed figures suggest that the majority of urban residents without adequate sanitation either lack legal title to their land, are renting their accommodation, or both. These people may well want better sanitation but balk at investing the sums needed. This is not merely a matter of affordability – a latrine or sewer connection, unlike a mobile phone, is a fixed asset. Should you need to move from your current accommodation – to seek a better job, because the government has forced you off your land, or because your landlord has found new tenants - you cannot easily recoup your investment.

A Maseru line house of rental rooms with shared latrine

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The recognition that affordability is not the only barrier is not new. The 1992 WHO report suggested that *"it is unusual, for example, for tenants to invest in a rented property, especially tenants who are poor. Do not assume that landlords will make improvements for tenants …"*. A recent study across Ghana found that *"it was extremely rare (1.5% of a large sample) for tenants to decide to install a toilet"*. (Jenkins & Scott 2007)

Why then raise the issue again and why now? For two reasons. Firstly, because the 2008 International Year of Sanitation will strongly push the need to 'sell sanitation'. Secondly, because sanitation investments that fail to ask 'whose land is it anyway?' risk changing little for hundreds of millions of urban dwellers. Lessons do exist. Throughout 2008 it will be crucial for policymakers and practitioners to heed their message as they discuss how best to solve the sanitation crisis in our cities.

WHAT MASERU'S MIGRATION MEANS FOR THOSE MARKETING SANITATION

An early forerunner to sanitation marketing was the urban sanitation improvement programme (USIT) in Lesotho, which has assisted households invest in ventilated improved pit (VIP) toilets since the late 1980s. Combining loans to home-owners with support to the local private sector and extensive use of promotion and marketing some 38,000 VIP latrines were constructed in Lesotho's urban centres (Maseru and thirteen towns). The programme, which offered no direct subsidy of latrine costs, was widely admired and considered a great success. (WSP, 2002)

Yet subsequent developments in Maseru have put the limitations of such an approach into stark relief. Since USIT was launched in the mid-1980s Maseru's population has virtually doubled to over 300,000 people. Growth continues at about 7% a year. The majority of new residents are poor, pulled to Maseru by the creation of over 35,000 low paid jobs in the textile and garment industries and pushed by both recurrent droughts and difficulties for migrant mineworkers in South Africa.

While the USIT programme targeted and lent largely to owner-occupiers, tenants living in low-income rental stock are now the neediest group. Sadly the way USIT works does not speak to their needs. A large new sanitation gap is developing amongst tenants living in 'line houses', or *malaene* – rows of one-roomed dwellings rented out for between $10 and $20 USD a month. It is common for five or more families to share a single pit toilet. As tenants, uncertain of how long they will stay in one place, these households have little incentive to invest in improvements and major maintenance.

WHOSE LAND IS IT ANYWAY? AND WHO OWNS THE ROOF?

"Housing was, and still is, an important issue affecting whether people invest in sanitation facilities"
(Darren Saywell, 1999)

When hundreds of millions of households are involved, generalising their situation is only so helpful. Yet two fairly distinct divisions exist. Some households have legal title to their land, many don't. Some people live in houses they consider theirs, many rent from others.

Four broad household categories can thus be distinguished:

	Land tenure? Yes	Land tenure? No
Owner occupiers	*A*	*B*
Renters	*C*	*D*

As the Lesotho case shows, a sanitation programme that addresses the needs of one type of household (A) may not meet to the needs of others (C).

Within the development community, including the water and sanitation sector, the issue of land tenure is widely recognised, the question of 'whose land is it anyway?' frequently posed. While hard data rarely exists, UN Habitat suggests that *"between 30 and 50 per cent of urban residents in the developing world lack security of tenure."* (UN Chronicle 1997) Yet when it comes to household incentives this stops well short of giving us the full story. A pertinent second question could be "whose roof is it?". For while squatters living in makeshift accommodation may not own the land they live on, few would argue that the roof is not theirs. Tenants however, are in a different position again – the roof is the landlords and they merely rent it, along with the rest of the house. Should the roof cave in, it is likely the landlords' job to get it fixed.

Yet there is scant discussion within the sanitation community about what landlord-tenant relationships mean for sanitation coverage. Indeed in development circles generally, surprisingly little work has been done on rental patterns, particularly in poor communities (even slum upgrading programmes rarely recognise the fact that significant numbers of rooms in slums may be rented).

Although the data is very patchy, we do know that patterns of renting are very mixed. Some cities are renting cities (such as Kisumu in Kenya, where 88% of people rent), some owning cities (such as Porto Alegre in Brazil, where only 13% of people rent). Renting rates can depend on the tolerance of land invasions (where these are not tolerated, then renting is generally more prevalent), while the geography of the city, its size and growth rate all have an impact. Overall, the rental market is far from static – changing over time as populations grow and economic circumstances change. As well as wide variations in the proportions of those renting, there is also huge diversity in types of renting and rental accommodation: backyard shacks in South Africa share the services of the main house; compounds in Ghana have extended families sharing a kitchen and a bathroom, ten room 'line houses' in Maseru share a common toilet; houses in India construct indoor toilets in order to build new rental rooms above them; absentee landlords in Nairobi use political connections to annex government land and let hundreds of rooms at a time.

Landlord-tenant relationships are consequently very diverse. Perhaps thanks to its hold on the popular imagination ("Africa's largest slum") Kibera in Nairobi is often cited. This typecasts tenants as poor and powerless and absentee-landlords as rich and well-connected. Yet this Dickensian stereotype does not fit many landlords and tenants. *"Landlords are not always wealthy and not always wealthier than their tenants. A World Bank study of landlords and tenants in Cairo has shown that … about 25% of landlords had incomes lower than the tenant median"* (Urban Studies 1996). A broad distinction can be drawn between absentee landlords and those who live on the premises, many of whom share facilities with their tenants (there may be little difference in the living arrangements of the landlord and tenant, or as in South Africa's backyard shacks, they may live in different types of house yet share the services of the principal residence). Equally many landlords were previously tenants; relationships are often more open and balanced than is assumed.

Some home owners have worse facilities than many tenants; those having recently invaded land may suffer from almost no services at all. Shared living is common too, such as in Ghana's family houses. These are often badly maintained, *"not only because the occupants are typically poor, but also because – being jointly-owned – family housing tends to behave as a public good, with each title-holder leaving the responsibility for improvement to others."* (Korboe 1998). In the early 1990s the World Bank found that *"approximately 90% of households in Kumasi are tenants living in multifamily apartment buildings or compounds. Tenant households cannot act independently; the landlord would decide whether or not to improve sanitation for the entire building ... tenants may try to persuade the landlord to install an improved sanitation system, and they may promise to pay a certain amount each month toward the costs, but ultimately the decision rests with the landlord"* (Whittington et al, 1993).

Clearly neither tenants nor owners can be considered as homogenous groups and generalising about their relationship is fraught with risk.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE 'SELL SANITATION'?

Sandy Cairncross and Vivian Valdmanis quite reasonably ask why it is that 2.4 billion people still lack sanitation when numerous studies have found that people are willing to pay for it (should a suitable product be offered to them on suitable terms) (CDC 2006). While they name high borrowing costs and a perception that latrines are expensive as constraints, they too point to the fact that many householders are tenants. They suggest that many tenants are wary of investing their own money and / or believe that sanitation is the landlord's responsibility. In this Cairncross and Valdmanis follow in the footsteps of Ernest Chadwick, the pioneering British health reformer, who suggested that the poor would not pay for sanitation improvements since many were too poor to pay, were ill-informed of the benefits and as short-term tenants, lacked motivation (Fisher & Cotton 2005).

This challenge has clearly bedevilled sanitation for many years, despite sanitation being *"in many areas … the most urgent health need"* (WHO 1992). As the UN Task Force noted, *"the challenge for policymakers and planners is learning how best to use public resources to influence … household decisions toward the public good"*. So what have we learnt about doing this since the era of Ernest Chadwick?

Past experience in persuading owners, and especially landlords, to invest in sanitation, suggests three broad approaches:

Compulsion – using the law to force landlords to provide better sanitation
Persuasion – providing incentives to invest in sanitation
Circumvention – seeking creative ways around the problem

- COMPULSION

Make sanitation a legal obligation

Many developing countries have legislation that obliges landlords to provide sanitation. One observer believed that in Ghana *"the summons is … a very effective weapon, as residents do fear going to court, not just because of the money, but also the social humiliation"* (IDS 2003). While tenants are not mentioned specifically, the implication is that environmental health officers can at times enforce compliance over owner-occupiers (and perhaps live-in landlords). Others paint a bleaker picture; *"in some countries, such as Uganda, there are regulations in place which state the landlord's responsibility to provide and maintain latrines, but these regulations are difficult to monitor, almost impossible to enforce and are currently worthless"* (WaterAid 2001).

The literature generally confirms that such approaches have a mixed record at best. A key challenge is capacity. In Kenya *"local authorities are supposed to ensure that landlords provide tenants with adequate sanitation facilities. However, most local authorities in Kenya no longer have the capacity to deal with these problems because of their diminished role in planning and managing urban development"*. (IIED 1997)

A more fundamental challenge still is that much renting lies within the informal sector. Alan Gilbert, in one of the few authoritative studies done on renting, suggested that, *"in many poorer countries, most rental business lies outside the law. In housing located in illegally developed settlements and even in some central city areas, few contracts are issued, the rental housing legislation is mostly ignored and few landlords pay income tax on their rental earnings"* (UN Habitat, 2003). In such contexts applying bylaws is an uphill struggle or worse.

Indeed when one looks at the historical record of cities in Britain one finds similar ordnances and similar challenges. The 1848 Public Health Act (mandatory in towns where the death rate exceeded 22 per 1000) was the first of its kind, creating a Central Board of Health and obliging householders to pay for sewer connections. Yet as Maggie Black highlights elsewhere in this issue, progress was very slow; after 30 years still only 12% of houses had water closets (flush toilets). Enforcing legislation on new households was proving easier than on existing ones and as late as 1936 (fully 88 years on) it was necessary for a new Public Health Act to empower local authorities to force householders to replace privy, pail and earth closets with water closets. Even then householders were only asked to pay half the cost of conversion. (WEDC 2005)

Land title as leverage

Authorities in Burkina Faso have found another means of compelling householders to invest in sanitation. Apparently *"more than 90 percent of households in the town of Bobo Dioulasso … have their own latrine as a direct result of the local administration's practice in the past of withdrawing rights of land tenure from owners who did not build a latrine on their plot within a specified time"* (DCCP 2006). The high coverage may well result from this pressure brought by local government; not clear is whether plots were being rented out or the owners lived there (and had double incentives; use of the latrine and right of tenure). In theory this approach could work in reverse, with local governments awarding land tenure to households that do build latrines (although there are often complex reasons for why households lack land tenure in the first instance and problems more generally with forcing latrines on people). Indeed lack of land tenure may make it impossible to enforce existing legislation anyway. *"Much of the land on which the slums have been constructed (in Nairobi) is publicly owned. This means that landlords are not legally obliged to provide any services - which results in no latrines, water, electricity, and solid waste collection.* (ITDG 2005)

Applying peer pressure

The success of Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) relies in large part upon peer pressure within a community to become 'open-defecation free'. This has had great success in rural villages, first in Bangladesh, then in India. Even landlords have proven susceptible to such approaches, as Kamal Kar, a champion of CLTS outlines; *"communities discovered … that temporary residents, such as tenants, continued to practice open defecation for lack of an alternative. The communities then pressed landlords to construct latrines for their tenants or alternatively, to allow tenants to use their own toilets. Community pressure and social dynamics ensured that landlords complied with such demands"* (IDS 2005).

Yet even within the same country, rural and urban communities are typically quite different. Urban communities tend to lack the stability (and occasional homogeneity) of rural communities. Rental patterns may also be quite different. Kamal Kar notes that "*occupation rights are insecure in most slums and so people do not want to invest when they may be evicted or moved on at any time. The potential of CLTS in these types of setting may be more in the context of latrine maintenance … rather than in construction"* (IDS 2005, co-author Katherine Pasteur). Tenants often share this unwillingness to invest, unsure themselves of when they may move on. Whether or not CLTS is effective in urban settings, this raises the issue of how effective peer pressure is in urban slums.

- PERSUASION

Compulsion implies use of the stick; persuasion is more about dangling the carrot. What positive incentives have been tried to get landlords or their tenants to invest in improved sanitation?

Higher rents for improved sanitation?

Perhaps landlords can become allies of those looking to sell sanitation. If rooms with sanitation are let for more than those without, a landlord might be persuaded to invest, recouping the cost of their initial investment and even turn a profit through higher rents.

Recent work on willingness to pay in Moshi, Tanzania, suggested that landlords were motivated to invest in sanitation where they felt that they could recoup this investment through the rent (CREPAO 2004). While this is an appealing prospect, hard evidence for it on the ground is hard to come by. World Bank supported programmes in both Ghana and Burkina Faso have looked to recoup some of the investment costs of sanitation through higher rents, but both ran into challenges. In Kibera, Wegelin et al found that rents were dependent on provision of electricity and type of structure, but not access to water and sanitation infrastructure (IIED 1997). In Benin Jenkins found that the ability to increase rent ranked last out of twenty possible motivations (Jenkins 1999). This finding was reinforced by a more recent World Bank study of slum settlements in Nairobi that found that while access to electricity and water affected rents, "sharing of toilet facilities with a large number of people does not seem to have any significant bearing on rent" (World Bank 2006).

Clearly, even where landlords are happy to invest in their properties, they may choose other improvements over sanitation (such as building a new room). So even where sanitation provision does lead to better rents (for which evidence is sparse and more research sorely needed), other priorities may hold sway.

Some are concerned that higher rents impact existing tenants, some of whom may be forced to move out. If tenants are given the choice they may well choose to keep rents low, as did mill workers in the American South in the 1920s when *"consideration [by the mill] was given to the construction of a sewer system, but the residents declined because of the higher rent costs that would result"* (Toler 1984)

Would cheap loans help?

Even where a landlord is keen to make improvements to their house (in exchange for higher rents or for other reasons), they may not have the money available. Hence interest in micro-credit lending, not for business activities, but for infrastructure provision.

Fifteen years ago some argued for loans to be made available to poor households, where necessary backed up by regulations and bylaws that push landlords to provide sanitation (WEDC 1991). In the early 1990s USIT in Lesotho did just this, offering owner-occupiers loans on easy terms. Around the same time similar loans were being offered in Ghana, but *"directly to tenant landlords for the installation of shared sets of latrine units. Repayment was to be made by the landlord over a 2-3 year period. The landlord would either add an amount to the rent or collect it separately"* (UNICEF 1995). Alas *"collection of loan payments … proved problematic ... (with) overbilling of tenants and lapses to the regular payment schedule. Landlords sometimes retain funds until all tenants have paid up or use the money as working capital. As of May 1993, over 40 per cent of the 224 loans disbursed in the 3 pilot areas were in arrears"* (WELL Fact sheet). The USIT programme (not aimed at landlords) found middle-class owner-occupiers taking more advantage than the poor and also suffered repayment problems. Other schemes (mostly pilots) have had better repayment histories, but have not usually lent to landlords per se.

The Ghana experience was based on research into householders' willingness to pay. Similar studies have suggested that sanitation investments will happen, if only the cost of capital can be lowered. Yet while cheap loans and micro-credit may offer some promise, Kumasi's experience suggests that those selling sanitation should be wary of other dynamics before deciding to subsidise loans.

Helping tenants negotiate with landlords

If tenants can be persuaded of the benefits of sanitation, perhaps they themselves can persuade landlords. WaterAid describe Shahda Parveen's experience in Bangladesh as follows: *"I was impressed when I heard about the benefits of sanitation and I asked my landlord to get involved … this was the only way life could get better … Many children are healthier and no longer get sick ... the landlord pays for the water and for the sewerage bill"* (WaterAid 2004).

The WHO suggested in the early 1990s that tenants could perhaps take matters into their own hands; *"where a landlord fails to build in a specified time, tenants (should be) allowed to build (latrines) and deduct (their cost) from (their) rent"* (WHO 1992). Yet this implies several things: that tenants value sanitation highly, have the needed capital to hand and are comfortable in confronting their landlord. There is evidence that in many contexts one or more of these conditions is lacking.

Where the rental relationship is not as harmonious as Mrs Parveen's, others may need to help broker the deal. In the late 1980s a Kenyan NGO, KWAHO, recognised the need to engage both tenants and landlords in planning sanitation projects. *"A site committee composed of fifteen members (was) drawn from different parts of Maina village. The Committee included representatives of landlords, tenants, women's groups and the village health committee"* (KWAHO 1992). Moshi in Tanzania has struggled to get tenants to pay to connect to its new sewer system; sanitation promoters there believe that to progress *"everything should be done to facilitate the co-ordination between these two groups (landlords and tenants)"* (University of Pau 2004).

Governments can play a similar role to that of KWAHO. In South Africa the Gauteng Department of Housing is looking to regulate landlord-tenant relationships, especially those of backyard shack dwellers. In the UK, US and elsewhere, local government plays a crucial role in overseeing and occasionally facilitating these relationships (as Googling "landlord & tenant & sanitation" quickly reveals).

- CIRCUMVENTION

Where the prospects of either compulsion, persuasion or a mix of both seem limited, other approaches are needed. Time for some creative thinking about what it really means to 'sell sanitation'?

Earlier a simple contrast was drawn between buying a latrine and buying a mobile phone. In poor urban communities similar yet subtle contrasts distinguish sanitation from water (and solid waste) provision. Water vendors deliver water services door-to-door – payment is on delivery and they care little if their customers are renters or owners. Standpipe operators have their customers come to them, paying as they go. Sadly, household latrines cannot come to you; by investing you are literally pouring money into a hole. When it's not your roof or not your land, this prospect is unappealing. Yet, if we can shift the focus from latrine investment alone, other avenues open up.

Shared and Communal Toilets

"If the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed will go to the mountain" (anon)

As Mohammed observed, mountains are pretty immobile. So are most toilets. One option then is to have the people come to the toilet rather than toilets come to the people. Hence the appeal of shared latrines, where one latrine serves a fixed group of households, and public toilet blocks, where one block serves a wider community. Although the infrastructure is still fixed, the building and maintenance costs are spread wider - each individual risks less investment. Tenants may be happier with public toilet blocks where they pay small sums on each visit or a low monthly fee. When the sheer density of slum housing leaves little room for any latrines to be built, both solutions are that much more appealing.

An astonishing 31% of Ghanaians use public toilets for their sanitation needs, which means the overwhelming majority of poor urban residents are reliant on them (IWMI 2006). Yet despite promising results in the 1990s when private managers ran the blocks, most have since returned to municipal management and are again plagued by the poor maintenance, overcrowding and filthy conditions that have given public toilet blocks a bad name the world over (IDS 2002). In contrast, experience with shared toilets, whilst diverse, suggests that where a limited number of known households use the latrines, social linkages and peer pressure can help to keep them better maintained.

Clearly neither option is as convenient as a well-maintained household toilet; women can be afraid to use them at night; children and the elderly can struggle to access them. Yet for poor, crowded communities with many tenants Madelin Wegelin and Therxese Kodo believed that public latrines are the only possible sanitation solution (IIED 1997). Their work in Nairobi is amongst the few studies that look at the issue in detail; they found that some tenants are even happy to contribute towards building and maintaining such blocks. Public latrines have been a popular prescription in South Asia, where NGOs such as Sulabh have found ways to bring communities together to build communal blocks that are clean and well maintained (although it is not immediately clear whether tenants are involved).

In Maili Saba in Kenya, Practical Action uncovered interesting links between shared household latrines and a newly-built public toilet. Landlords ceased to build individual latrines after the block was built, but those already built offered residents a valuable option. Sometimes they pay to use the block and sometimes they revert to using the existing household latrines (after dark, when low on funds, or during menstruation) (Practical Action 2005).

Different levels of service clearly offer residents choice. Choice opens the door to comfort and dignity and perhaps even to better health. Perhaps those selling sanitation should think harder about how to mix-and-match their prescriptions, thereby reaching more residents within any given community.

Creative thinking about 'sanitation services'

'Selling sanitation' is often misunderstood as selling toilets (sometimes deliberately). Yet sanitation marketing literature talks about sanitation goods *and* sanitation services. An improved toilet is a sanitation good; an improved pit-emptying service is a sanitation service. Arguably even owners of South Africa's township *spaza* shops provide a sanitation service by selling soap?

So where the situation regarding land tenure or tenancy suggests that selling toilets to individual households will be virtually impossible, can one focus attention elsewhere? How, for instance, is waste emptied from latrines? Are householders washing their hands?

In Dar es Salaam sanitation marketers are thinking creatively. Over 70% of Dar's population rely on pit latrines, some of which are emptied by vacuum tankers, but most of which are emptied by hand or informally 'flushed' during the bi-annual rains. A partnership has been set up to test different ways of emptying latrines, hoping to offer poor householders a better and safer deal. This responds not only to a glaring local need, but takes into account the local context, where over 90% are estimated to have access to sanitation of one sort or another.

The questions of who owns the land and who owns the roof are thankfully far less relevant when emptying latrines than when building them. Tenants are happier to pay for maintenance (as emptying can be considered), whilst in Dar it can be argued that emptying latrines better will deliver more benefits to dignity and health than a better toilet would. Emptying services tend to be mobile and although some government emptiers won't service areas that lack land tenure, many others will, so the question of who owns the land is of lesser importance.

There is scope here for creative minds to go further, looking to move away from pit-based systems to find solutions that are less fixed in nature, such as bucket or vault systems. While currently unfashionable, these may be better adapted to tenants or households without land tenure and offer a pragmatic way around the challenges.

Handwashing promoters can also worry less about land ownership; tenants and squatters are more likely to invest in soap than they are in a pour-flush toilet or VIP latrine. Yet some questions around tenancy remain relevant. Landlords can be hesitant to admit to outsiders that tenants exist; if those promoting handwashing have similar challenges in 'finding' tenants, then their messages may go astray. Handwashing also requires water, which may need investment in fixed infrastructure. If so, the same principal-agent problems arise as with tenants, but are perhaps easier to overcome (a cheap handwashing solution such as a SODIS bottle costs a lot less than a toilet).

CONCLUSIONS

Renting is a fact of life, and for many of us, a welcome one. Many cannot afford their own house or appreciate the flexibility renting lends. Over 70% of the Swiss rent. Insecurity of tenure is another fact of life for hundreds of millions of urban dwellers worldwide, albeit far less welcome.

Both these 'facts of life' have massive implications for how we get sanitation to the 600 million or more urban dwellers that lack adequate arrangements. For more than two hundred years public health campaigners have been 'selling sanitation' in one guise or another. They have faced similar challenges, and in developing countries at least, overcome most. What can we learn then, both from 60 years of development assistance and from the way towns and cities in the North evolved?

– Firstly, pay close attention to people's *incentives to invest*. Crucial early questions for any sanitation programme should be 'whose land is it anyway?', followed by 'whose roof is it anyway?'. From one place to another, differing answers will mean very different roles for sanitation champions.

– Secondly, although sanitation improvement may be largely a household decision, the public sector can play a very strong influencing role – whether through compulsion, persuasion or a mix of the two. The urban sanitation sector can *learn better* how others (housing providers, slum upgraders) have asked and answered 'whose land and roof is it anyway?'. Making compulsion and persuasion work will involve a diverse set of stakeholders; those selling sanitation are going to have to be open-minded and find creative ways to engage them.

– Thirdly, when selling sanitation, do not think only of improving household-level facilities. The MDGs are not the be-all and end-all. Where tenure and tenancy issues complicate household investment there are very strong arguments for public resources to be used in other ways. Decision-makers may need to revisit their idea of what constitutes a *sanitation service* and the appropriate role of the public sector therein.

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(For a full list of the references cited in this article, go to www.bpdws.org)

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Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD) is a not-for-profit membership organisation that supports public, civil society and private sector decision-makers and practitioners engaged in partnerships that provide water and sanitation services in poor communities. Active since 1998, BPD focuses on how best to structure, manage and assess such multi-stakeholder collaborative arrangements.

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