



Sanitation Partnerships: Maseru Case Study

Introduction

Maseru in Lesotho was known for the success of the Urban Sanitation Improvement Team (USIT) programme dating back to the 1980s, which rested on a strong partnership across government, donor agencies, service providers and others. USIT was established under the Ministry of the Interior to promote dry on-site sanitation in Lesotho's urban areas, with the VIP toilet the preferred technology. A parallel National Rural Sanitation Programme was established at the same time, but under the Ministry of Health. USIT worked with local builders to develop standard Ventilation Improved Pit Latrine (VIP) designs and construction norms, and conducted highly successful sanitation promotion campaigns to build demand, supported by a loan scheme to assist households to fund their own latrines. By 1995, over 12,000 households in Maseru had installed VIP toilets with USIT support. A formal programme linked the different parties together and governed how public finances were spent and results assessed.

In its prime – late 1980s to mid-1990s – USIT had 48 staff members, undertaking four main activities: sanitation promotion and demand creation; training VIP toilet builders; providing loans for constructing VIPs; and pit emptying. This programme has been documented comprehensively elsewhere (Blackett, World Bank, TAMS etc).

However since that era the population of Maseru has virtually doubled to over 300,000. Growth continues at about seven per cent a year with the majority of new residents comprising poor people fleeing drought in rural areas, and migrant mine workers no longer able to find work in South Africa. The biggest sanitation gap is no longer among owner-occupiers, but tenants living in 'line houses', or malaene – rows of one-roomed dwellings rented out for the equivalent of US\$13 to US\$24 per month. It is common for five or more families to share a single pit toilet.

Today, USIT survives but in greatly a weakened form. The programme now resides exclusively in government, yet responsibility for sanitation improvement is highly fragmented and resources are limited. The surge in demand for rental accommodation in Maseru means tenants are much less well-catered for than the owner-occupiers targeted by the original USIT programme. The authorities have not been able to respond to this major shift and its implications.

For BPD's Sanitation Partnership Series (SPS) the appeal of Maseru is similar to that of Dar es Salaam. It permits the BPD to look back on an established and successful programme, and assess its evolution and the pertinence of some of its principles for today's Lesotho. This case therefore concentrates on how changes in context can significantly alter the nature of the sanitation challenge faced, and the important role of urban migration and accompanying it, renting. It seems that different kinds of sanitation initiatives and partnerships may be needed in a context of low income rental accommodation.

Background

Lesotho is a poor country landlocked in South Africa, with a population of roughly 2.2m people. Maseru, the capital, is by far the largest urban centre, with a population estimated at over 300,000 and growing rapidly, due to a recent boom in urban migration. Yet, beyond its CBD, Maseru largely retains the appearance of a sprawling small town. Plot sizes remain

large – generally 1,000 m² and more – and there are none of the shack settlements that typify rapid urban growth elsewhere in the region. However the rapid influx of new residents is leading to densification in some settlements, with plot owners building rental stock for between M80 and M150 a month. It is estimated that well over a third of Maseru's population are not owner-occupiers.

Roughly half of Maseru's people do not have an adequate water supply, and rely on informal purchases from the estimated 20,000 households with private water connections. Sanitation provision is higher, at about 65%, due in large part to the success of USIT itself.

Evolution of Maseru's urban sanitation in the last decade

After donor funding came to an end in 1996, urban sanitation became a government programme, with staff progressively dispersed until only three employees remained by 2004. Compared to the urgency of improving Maseru's water supply, sanitation is currently seen as a comparatively low priority by government and its advisors. Yet while USIT achieved great success among middle-income owner occupiers, its impact among poorer households who could not self-fund construction of an improved toilet and who were not eligible for a loan was less evident.

Meanwhile since the early 1990s, the tiny manufacturing sector has been greatly boosted by the development of new garment and textile industries in Maseru and Maputsoe. Over 35 000 textile worker jobs have been created over the past decade, almost exclusively for women. Urban employment on this scale for women is unprecedented in Lesotho; coupled with the loss of mining income and recurrent droughts in rural areas, the result has been a huge movement of people to Maseru. Between 1996 and 2003, the population in Maseru alone grew from 200,000 to over 300,000 or about 7% per year. If current trends continue, a further 65,000 people are expected to move into the city by 2007. This profound change in the profile of Maseru's population means that today the need to address the requirements of the urban poor is particularly acute. Moreover many poor households live in rental accommodation, where responsibility for toilet provision lies with the landlord, not the tenant. Five to ten tenant families commonly share a single toilet, and in some instances, far more.

Changes in the institutional landscape

Sectoral co-operation was institutionalised in 1981 with the establishment of a National Steering Committee of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, which included all the sector departments and international donors, and was chaired by the Ministry of Planning. Donor involvement – primarily from ODA (now DfID) and KfW - was critical to the success of the programme, as much through the emphasis on strong co-ordination as financial support. Donor funding came to an end in 1996, and from 1997 urban sanitation became a government programme. USIT staff were absorbed into the Ministry of Local Government and the majority were later dispersed into other local government functions. Only technical staff were retained within USIT. Through a combination of redeployment and natural attrition just three employees remained by 2004: two technical officers and the co-ordinator. It seems there was a perception that the job was largely done.

Today there is no comprehensive domestic sanitation policy, while responsibility for policy-making has been fragmented across several Ministries and departments:

The Department of Water Affairs, under the Ministry of Natural Resources, is responsible for monitoring the quality of river water and effluent.

The Ministry of Health is responsible for safe-guarding public and environmental health, but existing legislation is poor and not enforceable. The National Rural Sanitation Programme is overseen by this Ministry.

The Ministry of Natural Resources, through WASA (Water and Sewerage Authority), is responsible for water-borne sanitation. On-site sanitation is addressed only as a sub-set of sewage at the level of implementation by WASA.

The Ministry of Local Government is responsible for urban planning and oversees urban developments. USIT falls under its Urban Development Services section.

Promotion of on-site dry urban sanitation still falls under USIT, within the Ministry of Local Government, but urban water and sewage now falls under WASA, under the Ministry of Natural Resources (Health's role in sanitation seems marginal). There is no longer a policy co-ordination forum for sanitation, and very little collaboration or communication between government departments.

The physical landscape

Land allocation in Maseru is largely controlled by traditional authorities. Residents negotiate with the local chief for a tract of land, and build a one or two room structure; over time, they may expand and upgrade their dwelling into a sizeable house. "We build one house for life", explained one informant, "we don't move around." The result is very mixed neighbourhoods: large brick houses with satellite dishes stand next door to one-roomed cement block dwellings. This diversity has important implications for service provision, as different service levels are needed to ensure the needs of all residents are met.

The sanitation programme run by USIT has proved highly effective at improving sanitation facilities amongst middle income urban households, but the sturdy VIP toilets promoted by USIT proved generally beyond the means of poor households (the loan scheme was captured by the middle class and broke down), whilst cheaper alternatives proved unpopular. Meanwhile the rapid influx of new residents has led to densification in some settlements, with plot owners building rental stock. The most common are 'line houses', or malaene, which are rows of one-roomed dwellings rented out for between M80 and M150 per month. No precise figures are available on the number of people who rely on rented accommodation, but it is likely that well over a third of Maseru's population are not owner-occupiers.

The importance of tenancy

The biggest sanitation gap is no longer among owner-occupiers, but tenants living in 'line houses', or malaene - rows of one-roomed dwellings. As transient tenants, these households have little incentive to invest in improvements and major maintenance themselves. Maseru highlighted that landlords are occasionally service recipients and occasionally service provider, while the level of 'on-site sanitation access' is important. BPD's work distinguished between three such levels. These are communal latrine blocks (public, community or privately run), shared latrines for a group of rooms or houses, which we called a compound facility, and individual household facilities. These all imply a different dynamic between tenants and landlords, and allocate responsibility for investment, maintenance, emptying and cleaning differently.

See the SPS spoke paper '*Landlord or tenant*' for more on this topic.

Building on the assets of the past

We've suggested that sanitation is no longer a high priority for government, with water dominating sector discussions. Yet there are signs that co-ordination and communication between operational staff involved in the different departments and programmes is improving. This might impact constructively on senior managers. A welcome development which may address fragmentation in the sector came at the end of 2004, when the Ministry of Natural Resources assumed overall responsibility for policy-making for sanitation, through the Commissioner for Water.

In the past, USIT was actively involved in assisting households who wanted to build or improve their dry toilets. It trained and certified builders, provided a range of standardised designs suitable for different conditions and affordability levels, worked closely with retailers of building materials, and administered a loan scheme funded through the Lesotho Bank. USIT staff would visit the householder's property, mark out a location for the toilet that would make pit-emptying easier one day, discuss materials and designs, assign a builder and provide some information around maintenance and hygienic operation. One of USIT's great achievements was to set national benchmarks around the design and quality of VIP toilets – to the extent that VIPs built independently of USIT are of similar quality to those that were built under close USIT supervision. Good linkages between USIT and toilet builders has facilitated quality monitoring and data capture on the number of toilets built, and USIT incentivised builders to remain within its network by rewarding them with tools once they had built a certain number of toilets.

USIT also applied its mind to pit-emptying, experimenting with a number of technologies: conventional vacuum tankers, mini-tankers called Microvac and Mini-Brevacs and hand-operated pumps. Of these, the mini-tankers were by far the most effective, largely because they could reach areas not accessible to the conventional tankers. But these were largely experimental vehicles, expensive to import and not mass produced, and maintenance became prohibitively expensive. Over time, USIT reverted to relying solely on conventional vacuum tankers.

USIT's intention was to pilot an effective pit-emptying scheme, and then hand it over to an appropriate authority – such as the Maseru City Council, or WASA. In 1995, it was agreed in principle that USIT's emptying services should be absorbed into WASA – but nothing ever came of this, largely because USIT could not recover the real costs of its pit emptying services and WASA did not want to take on this liability. At the time, residents were paying M60 directly to USIT – when the real cost was roughly three times as much. To this day, the tariff remains roughly a third of the actual cost.

Since WASA's establishment in 1991 it has been responsible for collection of conservancy and septic tank sludge. It uses 6 000 litre vacuum tankers, and disposes of the effluent at the city's main waste treatment works. In 1999 an attempt was made to outsource emptying of both toilet pits and conservancy tanks. The Privatisation Unit within the Ministry of Finance put out a tender, but failed to find a service provider willing to provide this service, without government subsidies, at a rate that was deemed affordable to Maseru's residents. A key problem was that the Ministry lacked basic data to inform realistic costing of a pit emptying service, and despite attempts to improve this since, the data needed to define and cost the scope of work is not available. Emptying of pits and conservancy tanks has remained WASA's responsibility by default.

WASA currently has a fleet of seven tankers to service all urban areas through the country, but often only one or two are operational on any given day because of maintenance problems. Residents wanting their tanks emptied must pay M150 upfront at WASA's offices in the city, and then wait to be serviced; the waiting time is anything from a few days to a month or more. Residents commonly by-pass this fairly onerous official system and pay the tanker operator a lesser amount directly for immediate service; casual observation of the speedy turnaround of tankers at the city's waste treatment works suggests that such informal business is brisk.

Conclusions

A decade later, the impact of USIT's work is still evident. Well-built latrines are evident throughout the city. Although relatively few builders are contracted or monitored by USIT, the standard and quality of construction remains high and VIPs are the benchmark. Lesotho government's programme targeted owner-occupiers. It focussed largely on demand

creation, and deliberately emphasized dignity and status messages, along the lines of what is today being called 'social marketing'. These messages have been taken on well by middle-class households, but offer little to poorer households who cannot afford permanent brick structures and who see few status benefits in a zinc top-structure.

The policy of not subsidising construction was vindicated by large-scale toilet-building by those who could afford to build. Yet many poorer households remain with inadequate sanitation and the government may need to reconsider what measures are needed to assist them, including possible subsidy. The category of poorer households should also be disaggregated - between those who rent accommodation, and have neither tenure security or incentive to invest; and owner-occupiers, who may need financial assistance. Given that landlords are now a significant roleplayer and stakeholder in the provision of sanitation amenities, incentives and possible sanctions should be explored to safeguard the sanitation interests of their tenants.

On the institutional side, in Maseru there is little residual evidence of the strong partnerships which drove widespread sanitation improvement from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. Meetings between sector partners diminished steadily until they fell away altogether. Currently there are no collaborative forums in the sanitation sector which engage in practical and creative problem-solving. What little co-ordination does exist is essentially procedural and bureaucratic, with little positive practical impact on the sector as a whole. Promotion of sanitation currently has low priority and inadequate funding. Spending on health and hygiene promotion focuses largely on HIV / AIDS, with opportunities for sanitation and hygiene-related linkages not being leveraged. Inadequate sanitation is not perceived as life threatening, and the benefits of good sanitation for healthy living in a context of HIV / AIDS are not widely understood. It could be argued that there is a certain complacency about the state of sanitation in Maseru, perhaps generated by the highly visible and widespread infrastructure that is USIT's heritage, yet that reaches few new residents, nor means waste emptying and disposal are satisfactory.

New partnership challenges

Today, the need is for a different kind of programme which speaks to the needs and resources of Maseru's poor, not the comparatively well-resourced owner-occupiers targeted by the earlier campaign. New partnerships are needed, with a different vision. But who are the interlocutors for Maseru's large population of renters? Who sanctions the landlords who collect rent even as they avert their eyes from unusable toilets? Who speaks for the poor, and how does this 'voice' shape the new directives of policy makers and call providers to account? What will it take to forge viable partnerships between communities, policymakers and providers which overcome the unique challenges of sanitation?

The BPD is especially indebted Kathy Eales, who it commissioned to write a paper on Maseru following the field visits, from which much of this text is drawn. This paper is available on demand (info@bpdws.org).