

The WELL Guiding Principles

Introduction

Published by WELL in 1998, The DFID Guidance Manual on Water Supply and Sanitation Programmes was a seminal work for progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the water supply and sanitation sector. The WELL principles and practices set out in the manual apply to DFID programmes and projects for improving access to *household* water supply and sanitation in developing services and should be considered in that context.



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The WELL Principles

People matter more than science

Failures in environmental health in developing countries are usually human problems of conflicting interests, inadequate human resource development, or an inaccurate interpretation of the needs and priorities of various stakeholders.

Whether or not technology and hygiene are promoted effectively has far more to do with specific institutional players and interest groups and their interaction than with medical or technical understanding.

Despite lip service to gender awareness, all too often the perspectives and roles of women are ignored or undervalued. We need to understand demand for services from women, men, and children across all social groups before selecting suitable approaches and technologies.



Software and hardware must go hand in hand

Many public health engineering projects fail because the hardware has been provided but the means to sustain the intervention beyond construction have not been developed. An integrated approach is required to develop suitable infrastructure by integrating the social, health, technical, economic, financial, institutional, and environmental aspects and planning for sustainable management, operation, and maintenance.

The many demands on the time of both female and male residents severely constrain what is sometimes naively viewed as the limitless potential of community management. We also know that efforts to improve hygiene are futile where the basic requirements of water, sanitation, or drainage cannot be met.



Both public and private aspects of environmental health count

Environmental health services often require both centralized resources (e.g. water treatment works, trunk sewers, landfills) and distributed resources (e.g. local public taps, house drains and street sewers, pit latrines, and street-level solid waste collection).

In addition, both public and private environments play distinct roles in disease transmission. In times of structural adjustment, public authorities have learned that they cannot manage both central and distributed resources, and that there are benefits in devolving responsibility for the distributed resources to local communities.

Such an approach can improve cost recovery and accountability to local residents, while reducing total cost.



Environmental infrastructure is about more than health

While improved health may be a project goal for infrastructural or environmental projects, it is not often a useful or complete indicator of success. On scores of occasions, water and sanitation projects have commissioned epidemiological or demographic evaluations of health benefits. Experience shows that,

while fascinating for academic researchers, such studies are time-consuming, expensive, fraught with methodological defects, and frequently produce misleading or ambiguous results. Moreover, they do not help to diagnose the weaknesses of a project, or suggest ways in which its impact may be strengthened.

Operational evaluations of facility functioning and consumer use, combined with studies of hygiene behaviour, are far more useful.

Such studies can also illustrate other benefits of water and sanitation that are valued highly by the users, such as saved time, convenience, cost, and dignity, which are all too lightly dismissed in a narrow medical framework.

Evolution of guiding principles

As part of the preparations for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (The Earth Summit) in

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, an International Conference on Water and the Environment was convened in Dublin, Ireland, in January 1992. The resulting Dublin Statement and its accompanying four Guiding Principles have remained the common basis for policy dialogues among donors and partner governments, not just in the WS&S sector but in the wider field of water resources development, management, and conservation. The four 'Dublin Principles' are quoted in full here.

The Dublin Principles

1. **Freshwater is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development, and the environment.**

Since water sustains life, effective management of water resources demands a holistic approach, linking social and economic development with protection of natural ecosystems.

Effective management links land and water uses across the whole of a catchment area or aquifer.

- 2. Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners, and policy-makers at all levels.**

The participatory approach involves raising awareness of the importance of water among policy-makers and the general public. It means that decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level, with full public consultation and involvement of the users in the planning and implementation of projects.

- 3. Women play a central part in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water.**

The pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment

has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programmes, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.

4. **Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.**

Within this principle, it is vital to recognize first the basic right of all human beings to have access to clean water and sanitation at an affordable price. Past failure to recognize the economic value of water has led to wasteful and environmentally damaging uses of the resource. Managing water as an

economic good is an important way of achieving efficient and equitable use, and of encouraging conservation and protection of water resources.

The Dublin Statement, January 1992

Reference

The Guidance Manual is available from:
<http://wedc.lboro.ac.uk/knowledge/know.html>

About this note

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