



Introduction

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≡ Introduction

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Why do we need to rethink rural sanitation?

At the end of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) era in 2015, there were still 2.3 billion people in the world lacking even basic sanitation, with most of these people living in rural areas (JMP, 2017). There have been some successful policies, programmes and projects but overall progress has been too slow and targets have been missed. As we move forward, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 aims, by 2030, to:

“achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.”

United Nations Development Programme, n.d.

The universal access, better standard of service, and specific focus on women, girls and vulnerable groups required by this goal represent a higher level of ambition, which calls for more large-scale, inclusive and effective programming.

The evidence suggests that ‘business as usual’ for rural sanitation interventions will not succeed. A new way of thinking and planning is needed. This course aims to address that need by describing a more flexible and responsive way of thinking about programming for rural sanitation in order to make programmes more successful and sustainable in moving towards the SDG target.

So what’s the problem?

We asked several experienced water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) professionals if they had any examples of problems or reasons for the limited success of past programmes. Figure 1 shows some of the comments they made.



'Rural WASH was being addressed through individual projects driven by different donor requirements, using different systems and approaches. We need a national programme so we can anchor projects within it, align our efforts and work collaboratively towards national goals.' **WASH manager, Zambia**

'Past rural WASH programmes tended to overlook girls and women and treated them as objects. It was mostly about ODF declarations, quantity over quality, and at times not empowering.'

WASH professional, Indonesia



'CLTS was working pretty well where we had good trainers, the community cohesion was good and there was strong leadership from the local government. But in other places we couldn't achieve ODF and needed to do something different.'

WASH officer, Madagascar

'We chose a place to implement but realised it was already saturated with other actors implementing their projects. We could just move on to other places but is that the right response?'

WASH officer, Haiti



'Previously we've been very focused on achieving project results but now we need to give more attention to sustainability and reaching everyone, according to the Sustainable Development Goals.'

WASH manager, Nigeria

Figure 1 What's gone wrong in the past?

This course will address these problems by helping to ensure rural sanitation programmes are:

- Appropriate for the location, informed by evidence and policy.
- Collaborative, making the most of potential partnerships.
- Inclusive, so that everyone in the target area can benefit and no one is left behind.

- Adaptable, recognising that a blend of approaches may work better than a single approach and changes might be needed over time.

The aim of the course is to encourage practitioners to embed these ideas in their practice of rural sanitation programming, and ultimately to improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of programmes.

Who is the course for?

The main audience for this course is practitioners who are working in rural sanitation programming – but that is only part of the picture. The potential users of this course are people who have, or aspire to have, a wide range of WASH sector roles including policy makers, planners, managers, implementers, and more. These people could be working for governments, donors, implementing agencies, NGOs or in the private sector.

In writing the course, we have assumed that readers will have some understanding of the main aspects of rural sanitation programming. However, all key terms are defined in the Glossary and a range of supporting sources of information can be found in the *Further reading* section.

Background to the course

This *Rethinking Rural Sanitation* course is based on the document *Guidance on Programming for Rural Sanitation*, which is part of the Rural Sanitation Approaches and Costing Analysis project, a joint initiative by WaterAid, UNICEF and Plan International. *Guidance on Programming for Rural Sanitation* is supported by several Annexes on specific topics and by other publications shown in Figure 2 and available [here](#).

To study this course, you do not need to read these documents but you may find them helpful as additional sources of information.

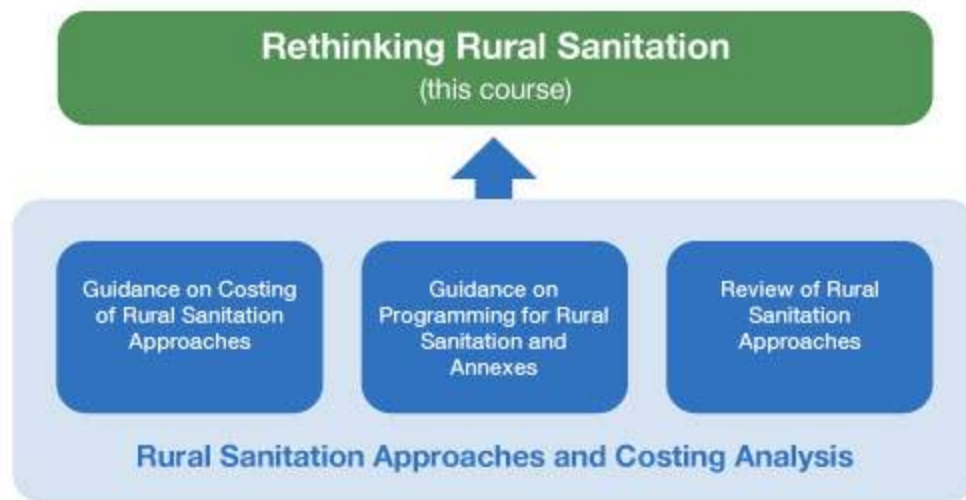


Figure 2 This course is based on the outputs of the Rural Sanitation Approaches and Costing Analysis project.

Scope of the course

This course is about the design and development of rural sanitation programmes that are large-scale, area-wide, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. Let's unpack those terms:

Rural – Rural areas are generally defined as the geographic area outside towns and urban areas where the population is dispersed in small settlements or scattered dwellings. Rural and urban areas present contrasting contexts and options for all types of service provision. Where settlements are small with low population density, the centralised systems appropriate for urban areas are not feasible. Note that the boundary between urban and rural is rarely clear cut; peri-urban areas around the edges of towns will have some characteristics of both.

Sanitation – Sanitation can be defined as effective separation of faecal waste from human contact. In practice, it means the safe management of facilities and services for the containment, collection, transport, treatment, and disposal of human excreta.

Programmes – Programmes consist of sets of related activities, projects, or events with a particular aim. Typically, a team of people with different roles and responsibilities will be involved in planning and implementing a programme.

Large-scale – In order to achieve universal access, sanitation programmes need to reach large numbers of people. While the numbers may vary with context, a large-scale programme is one that achieves the desired results across several communities or locations (e.g. an entire district or several districts), rather than just one.

Area-wide – This also relates to scale and the SDG challenge of universal access. An area-wide programme is implemented across an entire administration unit (e.g. a district) with the ultimate aim that everyone in the area achieves the target sanitation and hygiene outcomes and levels of service. The focus is on full coverage, social inclusion and sustained services for all.

Equitable – To be equitable, programmes must treat people fairly. Equity involves recognising that people are different and need different types of support and resources for their rights to be realised (WaterAid, 2018). To ensure equity, measures are often needed to compensate for discrimination and disadvantages.

Inclusive – Inclusion means that the needs of all people across the programme area, regardless of who they are or their circumstances, are fully addressed in the design, planning and implementation stages so that everyone has equitable access to safe sanitation facilities.

Sustainable – The outcomes of any programme, project or intervention should last into the future and remain effective over time. To be sustainable, programmes need to take account of the current – and predicted future – social, cultural and environmental context, as well as economic and technical factors.

Please note that the course has a focus on household and community sanitation in rural areas. It does not specifically deal with other aspects of sanitation programming such as institutional WASH (e.g. schools, healthcare facilities), sanitation technologies, urban contexts, faecal sludge management, solid waste management, or hygiene behaviours. You can find links to other sources about some of these topics in *Further reading*.

This course is intended to be an aid to thinking and planning for rural sanitation programming. It aims to provide guidance on the best ways to approach programme design or review. Any programme goes through a number of phases with monitoring and review of the process happening throughout (Figure 3). This course could be helpful at any point in the cycle by bringing a fresh look at progress and encouraging questions about whether a change of direction, or trying a different approach, or some other modification might be beneficial for programme outcomes.

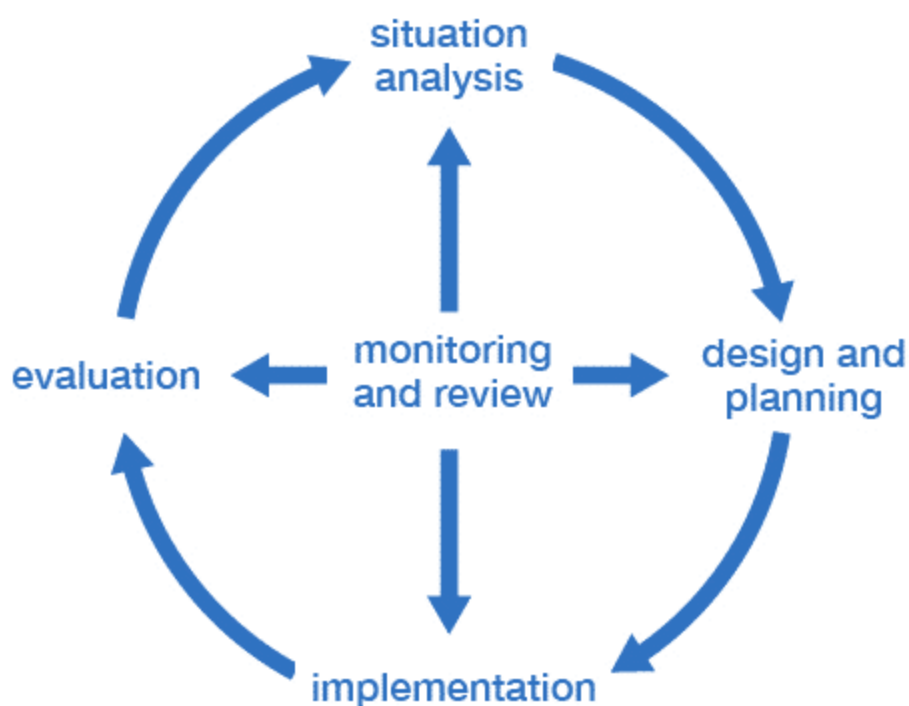


Figure 3 Simple programme cycle: this course is relevant at any stage of the cycle.

Studying this course

This course is designed for independent study although you may be studying in a group with others. Either way, we recommend that you use a Learner Journal (paper or electronic) that you keep with you as you work through the course to keep a note of any important points.

The course is divided into six separate study sessions, each expected to take between 1 and 2 hours to study if you are learning on your own. You will see that the study sessions all have a similar structure. Each study session starts with learning outcomes and ends with a summary.

All the terms highlighted in **bold** are defined in the *Glossary*.

In *Further reading*, you will find links to several sources of additional information and other useful resources.

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