

Sanitation Partnerships: A roundtable

The relevance of tenancy to sanitation in poor communities

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Introduction

Partnership approaches are currently generating a lot of attention and as sanitation rises up the international agenda, partnerships for sanitation are in the spotlight. There is much debate around how best to stimulate demand for sanitation and how to harness community initiative to bring better services to poor communities. Community-run toilet complexes in India, community-led 'total sanitation' campaigns in Bangladesh and social marketing (combining business marketing principles with socially desirable goods and services) have all sparked recent interest. (For more on these see Cotton et al.)

All these approaches rely on stimulating and then scaling-up demand for improved sanitation within households and communities. They involve sanitation infrastructure that is on-site (latrines, toilet blocks) and a significant share of the investment comes from householders themselves (in contrast to off-site sewerage which is usually paid for by public funds). The actions of those outside the immediate community are important: for instance, the NGOs who share community-mobilisation techniques, the private sector that provides sanitation materials and services, or the public sector that develops the policy framework.

Yet in contrast to rural settings, many of the urban poor are tenants. The prevalence of renting in low-income areas challenges demand-responsive approaches. The long-term perspectives of tenants and landlords can be quite different to those of owners - the incentives of landlords and their tenants to invest in improved infrastructure is generally much weaker. Tenants or absentee landlords may also be less enthusiastic about engaging in community-led initiatives.

While the perspectives of tenants, live-in landlords and owner-occupiers may be quite diverse, those living in the same neighbourhood are linked in one important way. This is the health risk that poor hygiene and sanitation poses to those that live in the same locality. Work has shown that the externalities of poor access to sanitation and unhygienic behaviour can be quite significant, especially in urban areas: if a significant minority of a neighbourhood are living in squalor or suffering from hygiene-related disease, then this disease



Tenants, live-in landlords and homeowners face similar health risks in this Nairobi slum.
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burden will be shared by all within that community. Thus tenants sanitation situation may be of concern not just to them, but to the wider communities in which they live.

Meanwhile, in many poor urban communities worldwide tenants are more than a significant minority – for instance in the ten African countries cited in a 2003 UN Habitat report on rental housing, renting across the city ranged between 34% and 82% (Gilbert 2003). Yet while much work in poor communities has focussed on supporting homeowners (improving land tenure, supporting home improvements, encouraging community self-help infrastructure initiatives), much less has focussed on how tenants access basic services. Specifically very little work has been done to understand what the presence of renters and rental accommodation means for sanitation. It is therefore hard to judge how or whether sanitation programmes can cater to the needs and perspectives of *both* tenants and owners.

The genesis of a roundtable on sanitation partnerships

A recent review of sanitation partnerships in five cities in Southern and Eastern Africa by BPD emphasised the significance of renting and tenants to local sanitation programmes. The research team observed firsthand the growing prevalence of affordable rental accommodation in poor communities. We also saw how sanitation advances from earlier decades are being reversed as settlement densities rise steadily and latrines are shared by more and more families.

In response to a paucity of knowledge on the links between tenancy and on-site sanitation, BPD convened a roundtable in October 2005. This brought together those who work on urban sanitation with those who understand how tenancy affects service delivery and infrastructure upgrading in poor urban contexts. The group debated the findings of BPD and other work, discussing the nexus of low-income rental, informal settlements and on-site sanitation. This note covers some of the key points of debate, interspersed with findings of relevant other work, and finishes with a short selection of conclusions and recommendations highlighting where more work would be valuable.

Household circumstances: a picture of diversity and flux

Surprisingly little work has been done on renting patterns, particularly in poor communities. Many governments in both the North and South encourage the concept of home ownership, for various reasons, including the belief that it contributes to economic growth and political stability. Conversely there is little support for renting and little recognition of its importance to millions of people; slum upgrading programmes, for instance, rarely recognise the fact that significant numbers of rooms in slums may be rented, or that new and serviced housing stock is likely to attract more and wealthier renters.

Although the data is 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. Economic circumstances are also important; during a recession renting goes up (except where land invasion is possible) and the rental market is generally far from static. 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 that share the services of the main house; ten room 'line houses' in Maseru that share a common toilet; houses in India where construction of an indoor toilet allows a new rental room to be built above it; absentee landlords in Nairobi who use their political connections to annex government land in order to let hundreds of rooms. Poor tenants may have better facilities than new home owners: those having 'invaded' land

may suffer from almost no services at all. Clearly neither tenants nor owners can be considered as one homogenous group.

Change over time is a third important theme. The settlements in Africa that BPD visited are becoming increasingly dense as small plots are subdivided; new rooms are built for a growing family or to bring in rental income. Yet the number of latrines remains the same (rarely more than one per plot) and latrine 'loading' is fast rising.¹

Landlord / tenant relationships

In keeping with the diversity of renting scenarios noted above, landlord-tenant relationships are very varied. Yet much of the literature in Africa seems to be biased by the situation in Kibera ("the largest and most densely packed slum in Africa") and typecasts landlords as exploitative as a result.

Yet exploitation is by no means the dominant paradigm. A clear distinction exists between absentee landlords and those who live on the premises, many of whom share facilities (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.

When it comes to sanitation, the landlord is occasionally a service recipient in the same vein as the tenant (e.g. where both use a communal facility), and occasionally a service provider (such as in Maseru's linehouses where they provide the latrine at the end of the block). Thus alongside the distinction between absentee and live-in landlord, the 'level of facility' is also important in structuring relations between tenants, landlords and sanitation service providers. BPD's work distinguished between three levels of on-site sanitation facility. These are communal latrine blocks (public, community or privately run), shared latrines for a group of rooms or houses, which we called a shared service, and individual household facilities. These all imply a different dynamic between tenants and landlords, and allocate responsibility for investment, maintenance, emptying and cleaning differently.

Rental relationships can also structure payments for investment or maintenance, as was the case when new toilet blocks were built in Mukuru in Nairobi: "The committee decided that landlords would have to contribute at a rate of Ksh 65 per room. This amount was paid by the tenants who then deducted it from their rent. Thus, in effect, it was the landlords who paid for the latrines. The chief helped by talking to the landlords and explaining the need for the latrines, and explaining the system of contribution collection, i.e. through the tenants." (Wegelin Schuringa & Kodo 1997.)

This dynamic situation is important for service delivery as it affects not only the levels of demand and the service loads, but also the layout of a settlement. As densities rise and houses squeeze together, vehicular access can be constrained: as troublesome for vacuum pit-emptying trucks as it is for fire engines and ambulances. Growing densities typically make service delivery more difficult. The relationship is bilateral: as services improve more tenants tend to arrive and new building takes place. Slum upgrading programmes therefore have significant problems in counting numbers which complicates programme design and delivery. This does not just apply to future residents; the number of existing residents can be hard to establish – it may vary with seasonal work in factories or fields, while surveys about renting are hard to conduct. Some landlords deny the existence of renters, fearful of taxation or regulation, or by simply not considering them properly 'resident' (even where they form a permanent feature of the neighbourhood) (Weru, 2004 and Gilbert, 2003). However, driven by the principles of unit cost accounting, urban upgrading often omits these dynamics. The diversity and change over time that

¹ Land tenure and inheritance can play noteworthy roles here. When land is bequeathed to several heirs and cannot be sold or sub-divided, then the growing family may all choose to live in the house, leading to overcrowding. Or the entire plot may be rented out and the rental shared between the heirs. Legal plots can be bought and sold while the market for illegal ones (those without land tenure) may be less fluid.

characterise renting patterns are clearly important from a sanitation viewpoint; flexible delivery mechanisms that can deal with this are needed.

Supplying sanitation

The three approaches mentioned on page one - community-run toilet complexes, community-led 'total sanitation' campaigns and social marketing - all rely in large part upon households and communities to meet their own sanitation needs. Social marketing relies on users paying for infrastructure and services, and looks to stimulate a private market in sanitation hardware that can grow of its own accord. Subsidy, if there is any, is largely confined to helping the market work better and to software activities such as hygiene education, rather than paying for household or community hardware. Community-led 'total sanitation' (CLTS) also espouses a zero-subsidy approach for hardware, reserving any external support for processes. Community toilet blocks in India have seen public money pay for hardware, with communities tendering for municipal contracts, but with significant contributions and the impetus originating from communities.



A Maseru line house of rental rooms with shared latrine: a 'compound' level of service
© Linda Tyers / BPD

Some are surprised that households and communities are being asked to develop their own facilities, rather than have them provided by the government (as is the case in South Africa and many cities of Latin America). The drive for communities and households to take measures more into their own hands seems to stem from two main sources: one, exasperation at the failure of government to deliver; and two, concern that inappropriate subsidies actually limit rather than facilitate progress at scale.²

This reflects the status quo in some settings; in Dar es Salaam for instance some 70% of people rely on latrines, yet there is scant public involvement in this domain. Government's focus is on sewerage networks, as reflected in the \$61M World Bank loan for sewerage (that hardly tackles the issue of on-site sanitation and thus has little impact upon poor communities). In Pune and Mumbai, 600 toilet blocks have now been constructed by communities who demanded reallocation and control of existing municipal sanitation funding.

Once this logic of "self-help" and "community mobilisation" takes hold, sanitation becomes partly a "business that functions at the level of the household" [Evans 2004]. Consequently tenancy becomes an important issue. This is for three main reasons:

- Firstly, the landlord can be viewed as a service provider as well as recipient;
- Secondly, the question of whether tenants engage in community initiatives becomes pertinent; and
- Thirdly, community cohesion and its relevance to tenants becomes a factor.

If the landlord is viewed as a provider, the question arises of whether they can be encouraged – incentivised or compelled – to provide better services to their tenants. In

² Yet few suggest that urban sanitation provision can or should be entirely self-sufficient or market-driven – government is called upon to play a role, but perhaps by redirecting public finance away from household facilities towards explicit "public good" elements of the system (waste water treatment or networks in urban areas) (Evans, 2004).

Latin America, where regulations on renting and letting are perhaps more developed, there are often many obligations on landlords. These include minimum standards, rent control, etc. Yet the reality is that these obligations are rarely enforced (and perhaps are even unenforceable); therefore it is unlikely that additional regulations for sanitation would assist. Anecdotal evidence from work by Gilbert also suggests that renting in Latin America works better (for both tenant and landlord) when it is not formalised – a further argument against formal regulations. In Africa the rental market is generally informal, especially in poor communities. Here compulsion is also unlikely to work. In Tanzania there is little regulation of sanitation; Environmental Health Officers can serve a notice to public traders (bars and restaurants) but their incentives to do so are limited (it generally makes them unpopular and perversely, can lead to suspension) (Sugden). Extending regulation of sanitation to private accommodation in such circumstances is unlikely to prove worthwhile.

CLTS in Bangladesh relies on significant peer pressure within a community to bring about change, prompted by community-level dissatisfaction with open defecation. Here there is perhaps a fundamental distinction between live-in and absentee landlords; the

“The landlords who do live in the area are generally poor but are willing to contribute to the construction of public latrines. The tenants are also poor, to a large extent transient and not willing to make investments in latrine construction.”
(Schuringa et al, 1997 on three settlements in Nairobi.)

former are more likely to be considered ‘part of the community’ and thus susceptible to pressure from neighbours (while they also share in the localised disease burden). Absentee landlords and short-term or transient tenants are probably less susceptible to pressure (the latter may feel the pressure but be unable or unwilling to make the necessary fixed investments). It may be that approaches such as CLTS and others, developed by NGOs in rural areas, will struggle in urban contexts (where community cohesion is often weaker).

If regulation is unpromising, can landlords be approached more as small businessmen, rather than ‘exploiters of the people’? Financial incentives are powerful, so perhaps loan schemes for upgrading could incentivise people to adhere to building codes and provide adequate sanitation. If better services led to higher rents then another financial incentive would be at work. Currently though, few loan schemes reach into poorer communities and the link between the availability of services and rental rates is poorly understood (and likely depends heavily on context – in Kibera in 1994 water and sanitation were not a factor in rental rates, though electricity and interior finishes were) (Wegelin-Schuringa et al 1997).³

Demanding sanitation

One of the questions asked at the roundtable was whether there are many community-driven campaigns to demand better services in Africa, and whether there is any pressure on the authorities to build toilets. In the BPD study of five cities, it seemed that there have been few such campaigns and only limited pressure on authorities, save in times of crisis such as cholera. Sanitation is generally low on people’s and thus politicians’ wishlists - remedying this is a key goal of campaigns such as the international WASH campaign.

³ Lack of land tenure is often cited as a disincentive for landlords to make investments in rental property. There are suggestions however that it is the perception of the risk of expropriation that is more important than whether one possesses formal land titles or not.

The ability to mobilise communities to demand (or self-supply) services was discussed by the rountable, as was impact of renting upon this. The leitmotif once more is diversity, although it seems that disaggregating households can help with planning; recent work in Dar es Salaam on viability of latrine emptying services broke down households into pure tenants, mixed tenancy and owner-occupied.

Nairobi may not be representative, but has prompted work on tenant-landlord relationships, slum upgrading and sanitation. This research found that *“any attempt to improve conditions in Nairobi’s informal settlements is complicated by the potential conflict between landlords and tenants and by the conflicts between different ethnic groups that often have been exacerbated by the manipulations of powerful political interests. In almost all informal settlements, the inhabitants lack tenure of the land they occupy. However, even without official tenure, there are landlords (“structure owners”) and tenants, and these two groups have very different priorities within any programme to legalize land tenure. Structure owners want to acquire full legal tenure of the land on which their structures are built; tenants want recognition of their right to live there and the possibility of becoming land and house owners. Many structure owners are in effect large-scale (and often absentee) landlords”* (Weru, 2004).

Not all situations thus pit tenants against landlords, but tenants’ participation in community-led initiatives may be broadly problematic. In Latin America there are tenants organizations in city centres (where the richer tenants tend to be) but less in the “self-help” periphery (Gilbert). Not all tenants wish to be homeowners, but many tenants do seek to upgrade over time, either moving to better rental accommodation or buying property of their own. Being transient, it may therefore be difficult to mobilise them to help build or fund communal facilities.⁴ In Nairobi surveys found that tenants were concerned that if they themselves constructed and paid for a latrine, the landlord would raise their rent and they would pay twice over (Wegelin et al, 1997).

The local political dynamics are clearly important to the shape any community mobilisation takes and its chances of success. Indeed work on how the Millennium Development Goal for sanitation can be realised finds it *“likely that increased access to sanitation is bound up with an increased ability on the part of the citizen/consumer to influence wider developmental outcomes”* (Evans, 2004).

Community peer pressure and joint community decision-making also tend to work better when there is a strong and unified demand for something: this demand is already rarer for sanitation than for other services (except, as noted, during crises). Given these hurdles, tenancy (specifically the ratios and perspectives of tenants) may be of lesser importance to community mobilisation around sanitation.



A community built and managed structure in Bangalore where NGOs helped mobilise people.
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“The question of tenant willingness to contribute on a membership basis will depend on the nature of the tenancy. For instance, transient tenants such as those in Mathare 4B (Nairobi) are unlikely to commit themselves to anything whereas longterm resident tenants are known to participate in community committees, as in Mukuru Village, and are very likely to be willing to support a service which responds to a felt need.” (Wegelin et al, 1997.)

⁴ Which may not matter if long-term residents that succeed in getting a public toilet block built let tenants use it on a pay per use basis.

Beyond the infrastructure

For two reasons sanitation cannot revolve solely around the provision of physical infrastructure:

- if health improvement is a desired outcome then behaviour change is critical.
- once built, infrastructure needs to be operated and maintained – this means keeping latrines or toilet blocks clean and functional.

The latter is especially important for on-site sanitation in dense urban settings; where household excreta is stored for the short-term, waste needs to be removed and preferably treated, hence the vital importance of pit-emptying practices. Does tenancy matter to either of these?

Renting and hygiene

When it comes to software the aim is to encourage hygienic behaviour throughout the entire neighbourhood. Here the activities of children are just as, or indeed more, important as those of adults (as transmission via the “public domain” (Cairncross, 1996) ensures that the disease burden is shared). The same can perhaps be said of tenants: in a neighbourhood where renting is significant, significant health gains will likely require the behaviour of tenants to improve alongside that of owners.

“Most committees [in Kitui village, Kenya] consist of older women who take pride in keeping “their” latrine block clean and well-organized. Initially, all households were owners, who felt a sense of ownership towards the latrines, and cleanliness was never a problem. With an increase in tenancy ... not only has the number of users doubled but the tenants do not feel the same kind of responsibility towards keeping the toilets clean. They feel that they are paying rent and, therefore, are not responsible for maintenance. Undugu Society has tried to convince the users to establish a maintenance fund for the latrines but people prefer to pay when funds are needed.” (Wegelin Schuringa & Kodo, 1997).

Tenants openness to hygiene education may not differ from that of owners. However, as work in Kenya highlighted, surveys often struggle to reveal that tenants are even there. If similar barriers are faced with other community outreach activities (health and hygiene education for instance) then the ‘invisibility’ of tenants becomes a concern (Gilbert, 2003). The transmission route – i.e. the way messages get from A to B - for health education is also important. In a poor urban areas this could be via the walls of a

communal toilet block or via the committee that manages it. If tenants didn’t use the block or were not communicating with the committee this would be a source of some concern. [see the box on Mathare 4B for an example of where this is problematic].

Where individual facilities are shared, then the users are often responsible for cleaning. Tenancy has proven an issue here. An example is the line-houses of Maseru, where conflict or confusion has arisen over whether cleaning is the responsibility of the landlord or of the tenants.

Renting and waste disposal

In a dense urban environment it is rare that new pits are dug when the existing one fills up (as would happen in rural areas). Ways are found to empty or drain the pit and use it again, especially where there is any significant investment in a fixed superstructure. Yet the means for doing this in poor communities is often highly unsatisfactory: pits are ‘flushed’ into



Sludge disposal by manual pit-emptiers in Kibera
© Sabine Bongi / WSP

the surrounding yards and streets, manual pit emptiers who cannot bury the sludge on plot, tend to dump it where they can. This tends to erode any health gains that better excreta storage and hygiene behaviour may bring about.

The situation is partly a consequence of the inability of formal pit-emptying services to reach poor communities (whose streets are too narrow or who cannot afford them). But ironically it is also exacerbated by the long time it takes many pits to fill. Where tenants do not share a latrine with their landlord, they are typically responsible for its emptying. Yet when a pit can take as much as five years to fill, short-term tenants are effectively being asked to pay for waste they themselves did not generate. Accordingly they prefer to pay for part-emptying by manual emptiers (which costs them less as a smaller volume is emptied), or find other alternatives, often even less satisfactory. The waste may leave the pit but rarely leaves the neighbourhood, which does little for the public good.

Those looking to improve upon how pits get emptied therefore need to engage with the tenancy issue and understand the relationships between those who provide facilities (typically landlords) and those who empty them (typically tenants). Equally those hoping to improve the physical infrastructure (latrine building or communal toilet block programmes) may need to take tenants into account when it comes to the issue of who cleans, operates and maintains that infrastructure.

Conclusions

- Tenants can form a significant share of poor urban communities, and although they personally can face the same sanitation challenges as owners, their perspectives on the problem can be very different.
- This may have significant implications for approaches that seek to stimulate household and community demand for sanitation, such as social marketing, community-led infrastructure development, and 'total sanitation' campaigns.
- Yet, beyond the anecdotal, there is very little information available on the prevalence of tenancy, its implications for service delivery to the poor and on sanitation provision in particular. Tenants are often 'invisible' to policymakers.
- Nor is much widely known on the link between availability of services and the level of rents, something that may have important consequences.
- What is known is that patterns of renting are very diverse and subject to significant flux over time. The demography of 'sanitation beneficiaries' is thus very diverse and changing, and sanitation approaches need to be flexible enough to take this into account.
- Landlords can be both a service customer / recipient and a service provider and rental relationships can structure investment and maintenance – this needs to be factored in when planning sanitation services.
- Encouraging landlords to bring about service improvements (through compulsion or incentives) may be one way to bring about change. Yet there is little practical workable experience on either.
- Getting tenants to participate in sanitation-related community mobilisation may be problematic, but ultimately may not matter, partly depending on the level of service envisioned.
- Beyond on-site sanitation infrastructure, behaviour change and emptying and treatment are important to deliver health gains and the public good. More could be understood on the role that tenants play in both these areas.
- Champions for taking forward the issue, should it prove important, are not immediately obvious, though a start may be to facilitate further links between those working on new sanitation approaches and those with experience in urban slum upgrading.

Recommendations

Understanding the impact of tenancy may be critical to effectively meeting the rapidly growing challenge of sanitation in poor urban communities. Yet as the above points suggest, there is a dearth of information on the topic. Accordingly BPD recommends the following avenues for further work:

- How important is the “public domain” route of transmission in typical urban slums, and does this imply tenants and non-tenants that live in close proximity have a shared interest in improving community-wide sanitation?
- Have urban tenants been beneficiaries of recent sanitation approaches, such as social marketing, community-led total sanitation and community built toilet complexes? How important a constituency are tenants for these three approaches and what does this suggest for those working in poor communities where renting is significant?
- What does the link between access to services and rental income in poor communities depend upon? What does this imply for landlords’ incentives to invest in better services? What other arguments can be used to motivate landlords?
- Does the ‘invisibility’ of tenants affect the penetration of health and hygiene education in poor settlements? Which types of communication are best at addressing their particular needs and constraints?

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