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Title	Paradigm Shift in EcoSan, Lessons from the UWEP Programme
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Paradigm Shift in EcoSan, Lessons from the UWEP Programme

WASTE, in Gouda, the Netherlands, manages the programme “Integrated Support for a Sustainable Urban Environment (ISSUE)”, which has an EcoSan focus. This programme builds on the experiences of WASTE and its programme partners from seven years of the Urban Waste Expertise (UWEP) programme, and other interventions previous to UWEP.

WASTE works with a network of Southern partners, some of whom are present in Durban, and many of whom are members of the SURCO association. Partners set the agenda and implement the work locally, WASTE mobilises funds and provides support for project development and implementation. WASTE and the partners are committed to elaborating knowledge about the urban environment in the South and countries in transition, and in keeping that knowledge and capacity in the South, where it builds up institutional memory, credibility, experience, and the capacity to intervene to improve the urban environment and the lives of urban dwellers, especially the poorer ones.

In UWEP, most of the interventions focused on solid waste, a priority of the partners at the time the programme began. All of the partners are development and change agents in their national and regional context. Like WASTE, they have built up specialised knowledge in waste management almost by accident, and continue to work in the solid waste area because it works as a change trigger. Specifically, the lessons of UWEP suggest that:

- ◆ stakeholder platforms are perhaps the most potent local change agents, and are a key part of the solid waste modernisation process;
- ◆ solid waste systems don't work without public participation and consultation, so they become laboratories for developing these techniques, both in the North and in the South;
- ◆ compared with other socio-technical systems of provision, solid waste is “light” on capital infrastructure, so systems can change rapidly when confronted with the political or social pressure that accompanies a paradigm shift;
- ◆ the informal sector in waste management is making a livelihood by recovering recyclable materials, which they can do because of the status of waste as a common property resource; and
- ◆ because solid waste is a relatively young system of provision, it is easier for officials to understand and admit that the existing approaches don't work, and that makes them more open to change – and to the participation of citizens and non-technical advocates in the change process.

The UWEP programme explored these change dynamics in the four PPS cities, and

then made a deliberate decision to see if the knowledge gained could be used directly to change the framework for solid waste – or trigger a paradigm shift. The later UWEP phase focused on planning – while plenty of *activities* are possible at local level under existing governance and political arrangements, planning is sure to implicate the authorities, and, if they approve the plans, will result in real change.

There was about a 100% correspondence in UWEP between the successes and the extent to which the approaches used by the partners and WASTE were bottom-up and inductive. The experience of UWEP is that the platforms were the key change agents, chose the path, and used WASTE and its experts as support, and not the other way around.

For this reason, perhaps the most important result of the UWEP years was for WASTE to make a definitive shift, and to “find itself” as a development organisation with a well-developed, if *seldom explicitly articulated* – clear post-modern agenda and approach. Waste and sanitation are only the tail end, but we are moving the tiger. Changing the power structure – and creating a space for poor people to have a say in it – is the real goal.

WASTE and EcoSan

WASTE has, since 2001, been developing a line of EcoSan projects and an EcoSan research agenda, EcoSan also has its roots in post-modern critique of development – and the key focus is on *planning*, represented by the results of strategic sanitation planning. Also, the emphasis on consortia, local actors, and platforms capitalises on the experience of UWEP, at the same time acknowledging that sanitation is a much bigger tiger than solid waste.

Unlike solid waste, sanitation is well-organised, has clear bureaucratic, institutional and governance rules and structures, has made a clear choice for one particular technology and system of provision (water lines, flush toilets and sewer grids), and is able to make significant claims to have discovered and operationalised “scientific and technical truth”. Sewerage-based sanitation systems in centres of Southern cities (and in the North) appear to *work*. They are accepted by political and financial power centres as a proven, mature, reliable solution (the *right answer*) to an unchanging problem.

This claim for truth is supported by a century and a half of hard capital infrastructure investment, which translates that certainty into an enormous physical barrier to change. Sanitation systems have a relation to common property resources, but the main resource – water – is itself contested and the subject of many rights conflicts, so the economic claims are also more complex than in solid waste. These characteristics make them much more rigid and much more difficult to shift than solid waste – and a much bigger target. But this does not mean that the *processes* for stimulating, supporting, and documenting change on the local level are different, nor that sustainability is less important. In contrast, this is precisely the opportunity for taking the experience built up to new levels.

In ISSUE, WASTE and its partners have taken up the challenge of changing sanitation business as usual and leveraging a paradigm shift – but in a bottom-up, participatory way, making alliances with key local partners. The goal is nothing less than, city by city, community by community, challenging received wisdom that large

capital sanitation investment should focus on sewerage and flush toilets. A second line in ISSUE is establishing feasibility of ecosan on a system level, based on the ISWM framework. But that is the subject of a separate paper.