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Title	Lessons from a Multi-Country A Review of EcoSan Experience in East and Southern Africa
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Lessons from a Multi-Country A Review of EcoSan Experience in East and Southern Africa

The scale of the sanitation crisis in Africa is enormous. 'Business as usual' is not an option. Many governments and agencies in Africa are exploring the role of EcoSan within their environmental sanitation and hygiene improvement programmes, but despite strong and convincing environmental and economic reasons to support this approach, acceptance of the technology has been limited so far. This paper reviews experience in East Africa and, with less detail, Southern Africa. The review is mostly based on existing reports, including several commissioned by WSP-AF, but it does not claim to be fully comprehensive. The aim was to identify as many successful EcoSan projects as possible; and to understand why take-up of EcoSan has been limited.

The work of the WSP affirms that there is a role for a variety of EcoSan technologies in sanitation improvement programmes, but this role will vary according to geography, economy, culture etc. However, the first priority continues to be the need to achieve health benefits through hygienic behaviour and improved sanitation facilities; environmental and nutritional benefits can and should follow. This paper reviews what has been achieved to date and identifies some lessons for future projects.

The most important factor in assessing the potential for increased use of any sanitation technology is the degree of acceptance in a community, as measured by willingness to adopt or invest in that technology. The paper explores that concept and examines issues that help or hinder acceptance of EcoSan technology. Four measures of acceptance are proposed, namely: continued use, correct use, spontaneous copying and the use of products in agriculture.

Using these measures the paper evaluates findings in order to provide guidance for the design of more ambitious programmes. This informs commentary on a number of programme issues and challenges common to all sanitation improvement programmes. These are: the key role of promotion, the search for appropriateness, the importance of user education, the details of technology, and the role of subsidies.

This review reveals slow progress towards solving the sanitation and environmental challenges of the region. Over the last two decades, despite many projects financed by NGOs and international agencies, with one or two remarkable exceptions, relatively few households have been persuaded to re-use excreta in agriculture.

Current approaches must be more sensitive to what local economies and customs can embrace. EcoSan may simply be inappropriate or not demanded for widespread use in some localities where soil fertility is still good. In others, sensitive introduction of EcoSan in response to local conditions, as an option alongside other technologies, could provide much needed economic and health benefits.

The use of extensive but unsustainable subsidies may have achieved some short term gains

but appear to militate against long term affordable solutions of the type that will be necessary to achieve meaningful progress towards sanitation coverage for half the world's population by 2015. A better alternative is to design pilot projects from the beginning with approaches that can be sustained in the long term and to use marketing to encourage the spontaneous copying of technologies beyond the constraints of project resources.

The limited but encouraging experiences reported from Malawi and Mozambique suggest that a sensitive response to local conditions may produce sustainable and replicable results, but the principles and methods of such approaches need to be tested in other environments before their widespread application can be guaranteed.