



Supporting the Least Able Throughout and Beyond CLTS

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Since its conception in 1999, Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) has spread to over 60 countries and resulted in millions of people across the world living in open defecation free (ODF) communities. The approach was a departure from subsidy-driven sanitation programming which often led to uneven adoption and only partial use. CLTS enabled communities to own the process and collectively work towards becoming ODF. However, since its implementation at scale a number of challenges have appeared. Emerging evidence is suggesting a need to better support the most disadvantaged with accessible and sustainable sanitation facilities.

This Learning Brief presents emerging principles and action points to strengthen intra-community support and introduce external support mechanisms for the least able when necessary and appropriate. It is one of several outputs from an Asia-region workshop convened in the Philippines by the CLTS Knowledge Hub and UNICEF between 24-28 May 2017. Other resources can be found at: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/resource/supporting-least-able-throughout-and-beyond-clts

Why Now?

In the Sustainable Development Goal era we must 'By 2030, 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.' This global agreement means we can no longer focus on easy wins but must ensure no one is left behind.

Latrines built by the poorest and most vulnerable are more likely to collapse, be ill-maintained or unhygienic. A number of sustainability studies have shown that slippage is a serious risk and that it is most likely amongst those least able to build and maintain sanitation facilities by themselves (Cavill et al., 2015).

National sanitation policies, especially in certain Asian countries, set high standards for latrine designs that are often very difficult for the least able to afford and

build themselves. These policies have also led to the construction of toilets that need emptying and other services.

As CLTS has been scaled up, implementation has spread to communities that do not meet the favourable conditions listed in the CLTS Handbook (Kar with Chambers, 2008). These include:

- *Challenging environments:* high water tables, coastal communities, rocky or sandy soils, areas prone to flooding.
- *Social challenges:* heterogeneous, multi-caste, faith, class, communities. Conflicted communities with low social capital.
- *Institutional challenges:* human resources are not always strong enough to facilitate a good enough standard for CLTS pre-triggering, triggering and follow-up to achieve sustainable sanitation outcomes for all at scale.



The least able	Those who are potentially disadvantaged and <i>least able</i> to provide sustainable and accessible sanitation for themselves. These can include, for example, those living in vulnerable areas, people with disabilities, socially marginalised groups or cash and asset poor.
Support	<i>Support</i> is used as opposed to subsidy in order to include a wider range of options including technical guidance/assistance; facilitating access to land/space/communal resources. It is broader than subsidy which is often equated with external financial or material support with little community involvement.

Table 1: Terminology and explanation of the *least able* and *support*.

Under these unfavourable conditions, we cannot assume spontaneous intra-community support is happening or that available community resources are always sufficient to overcome their sanitation challenges.

Types of Support

The line between internal and external support is not always clear-cut, some mechanisms can be provided by both intra-community and external support instruments. However, there are two broad categories:

1. *Facilitating and strengthening* intra-community support including: free manual labour; technical support from skilled workers; collection and provision of locally available materials; provision of purchased materials; loans or grants from communal savings, savings groups or wealthier individuals; mobilisation of cash or material donations; and negotiating permission to use space.
2. *Providing support from outside* such as contracted service providers, vouchers, consumer and supplier rebates, conditional cash transfers, subsidised credit or subsidised transport costs.

Both have been integrated on the journey to ODF as well as be used to maintain and build upon gains post-ODF. Though there is a cross-over, the former is focused on intra-community support and the latter on support external to the community.

Issues and Concerns

We need to ensure that we do not undermine the original CLTS principles of community-led decision-making and local solutions; focused on people not hardware; behaviour change not construction programmes; total not partial improvements. Furthermore, we must not undermine government accountability, leadership and ownership.

There is no clear consensus on whether external support can be introduced pre-ODF in a way that does not disrupt the momentum to achieve ODF. However, we need to carefully examine if there is a case to be made to 'not rush' ODF and provide support to those most disadvantaged/least able households for the sake of sustainability and inclusiveness.

Using community-led, participatory approaches to identify those in need of support can be human resource intensive – going to scale with such an approach would need to leverage local government actors who may not have skills, time or resources to support this.

There is a dearth of evidence regarding when and how to introduce support that targets the least able, is cost effective and does not disrupt community self-help processes.

Careful consideration of the trade-off between ensuring the human right to sanitation for the least able and perversely incentivising those that do not act for themselves is needed. Situations where demand for sanitation services are apparent but unaffordable must be carefully assessed on a case to case basis.

It is particularly important in the context of high unimproved toilet use and low open defecation rates – where those few still practicing open defecation likely fall under the category of least able. Another context would be disaster prone or post-conflict/post-emergency contexts, where entire populations have lost their latrines, homes and livelihoods and likely require a range of external support.

In these cases, external support mechanisms should still ensure that decision-making and leadership are exercised by local communities (i.e. not reverting to supply-driven, externally imposed solutions).



Toilet built by disabled man and family in village outside Tacloban, Philippines. Credit: Jamie Myers

Emerging Principles

1. Ensure the least able are intentionally included in all stages of the process

Be explicit about recognising, involving and consulting the least able in CLTS processes, and in post-ODF and sustainability monitoring. Make sure their voices are heard, and their skills and capacities are recognised and valued – following the principle of “nothing about us, without us”.

2. Strengthen equity and inclusion in the sector enabling environment

Ensure that equity and inclusion are incorporated throughout sector-wide organizational and government policies, strategies, guidelines and training materials, including CLTS training materials and ODF verification protocols. Promote and use policy frameworks that provide guidance and flexibility to local actors in identifying and reaching the least able.

3. Recognise that the government is the primary duty bearer

Efforts to strengthen the inclusion of the least able should support and empower this role, including government responsibility for leading, steering, regulating and monitoring, and for the harmonisation of sector approaches. Where decisions are made on supporting the least able, they should be based on consultation and align with government systems and policies.

4. Aim for scale – and carefully assess trade-offs

All approaches should be designed to scale, which requires that policy makers and programmers carefully consider the cost, simplicity and the potential effectiveness of large-scale implementation. Test approaches, but in a way that recognises the challenges of scale. Recognise that high quality support and facilitation are unlikely to be available in all areas.

5. Recognise that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution

Different contexts will require a different mix of solutions. There is rarely a single perfect approach or support mechanism that will improve equity and inclusion in sanitation and hygiene improvement processes. Avoid reducing equity and inclusion efforts to only a few high-profile categories (e.g. people with disability), or using overly specific criteria that limit recognition of the diverse and variable nature of those who are least able in different contexts and at different times.

6. Celebrate ODF and recognise it is not the end of the process

Safely managed sanitation is the aim of the Sustainable Development Goals. Post-ODF processes need to start moving communities,

including the least able, towards safely managed sanitation. CLTS alone may not be able to do this. Some community-level actions can be taken, but this issue may also require engagement with service providers and larger-scale (district/municipal level) investments. The least able are likely to have more challenges in developing safely managed sanitation facilities, or in accessing services where these are available.

7. Local support to the least able wherever possible

Whether support is provided from inside or outside the community programmes need to remain demand-driven. Local support is the least likely to disrupt and undermine community processes. Where communities and village governments provide support to the least able (in the form of free labour and/or materials), the targeting is more likely to be accurate, and the level of support is more likely to be appropriate. Where external or higher level stakeholders provide support local decisions on targeting and the type and level of support are also thought more likely to improve outcomes and sustainability.

8. Promote area-wide outcomes that safeguard universal reach

Elevating the community outcomes to area-wide (e.g. entire districts or municipalities covered) outcomes requires a more strategic planning approach and careful consideration of different contexts whereby the various challenges (social, political, economic, physical, environmental) are recognised and addressed – avoiding the risk that the low-hanging fruit are targeted while the least able and the most difficult to reach are left behind.

9. Provide simple technical guidance to ensure sanitation for all

The CLTS process should encourage community innovation (in toilet design and development), but some capacity building support may be needed to enable the community to understand relevant technical options, particularly in relation to accessibility for people with disabilities and mobility challenges, and in challenging physical environments. Capacity building on these technical options may also be valuable for masons and suppliers, and to those involved in faecal sludge management.

10. Include other criteria in ODF monitoring and verification processes

Develop equity and inclusion criteria in ODF and post-ODF monitoring and verification to assess whether the least able have been reached by CLTS processes, and have managed to stop open defecation and develop improved sanitation and hygiene behaviours.

Action Points

- **Policies and Guidance:** National and organisational policies and guidelines for CLTS/ODF/total sanitation programmes should be reviewed using an equity and inclusion lens – revised protocols and supporting tools (training materials, facilitator manuals, verification guidelines and criteria/checklist) should be developed (either re-issued or as addendums) and disseminated.
- **Capacity development:** Adaptations to policies and guidelines need to be coupled with training to reorient staff including existing trainers and implementers.
- **Monitoring:** Conduct sustainability and equity checks in formerly declared ODF areas.
- **Partnerships:** Seek advice and support from those outside of the WASH sector. Where possible, partner with existing groups that represent disadvantaged groups or include the least able in all aspects of the programme cycle.
- **Learn by doing:** Action orientated research should be used to fill evidence gaps needing urgent attention. Focus on different successful approaches to identify the least able, understanding the challenges to participation and inclusion in each stage of the CLTS/post-ODF process, and the challenges in maintaining hygienic sanitation facilities.
- **Knowledge capture and sharing:** Document examples of positive deviants that have embedded inclusiveness in CLTS processes or introduced external support models. Mapping different approaches globally, regionally and nationally could be a useful first step. Governments and partners should facilitate horizontal and vertical learning exchanges to learn from these cases ensuring the voice of least able and field level implementers can feed into policy and guidance development.

Taking care of the concerns, facing the challenges and implementing these identified action points are efficient ways to start improving current practices. Keeping procedures simple, decentralising responsibilities and strengthening participatory approaches should lighten administrative demands and help aim for scale. Giving priority to those who are least able should be a cost-effective way to achieve outcomes: by promoting inclusion and social solidarity so that communities themselves provide more support, by reducing the need for outside interventions, and by simultaneously enhancing equity and sustainability. Where this is not possible external support may be necessary, however using community mechanisms to decide and deliver that support should be strived for. Putting those who are least able first in CLTS processes is a win-win: for equity and sustainability, for programmes, facilitators and communities.

What is presented here is the beginning of a longer process. This short Learning Paper highlights some key points that need further consideration, research and more discussions across the sector. It is hoped that this conversation can continue with all working towards universal access to sustainable sanitation.

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