

Shit travels fast: towards a global CLTS network

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by PETRA BONGARTZ

Introduction

Imagine sitting at a table in a nice hotel, perhaps in Nairobi or in Phnom Penh, in Delhi, or in Lusaka. At the table next to you, a group of people is engaged in animated discussion. As you start to pay closer attention to their conversation, you cannot believe what you are hearing. You feel surprise, shock and disgust. Or perhaps, if you are of a stronger constitution, you are intrigued and wonder just what it is these people do for a living. And why is there so much laughter and cordiality?

Well, congratulations, you have probably stumbled upon one of the many meetings of practitioners of Community-Led Total Sanitation, or CLTS for short, who spend their time discussing the politics of shit. Not long ago, I myself would have been surprised to find that shit makes for such a good source of conversation and can bring people closer rather than make them recoil with disgust, embarrassment and discomfort. However, since starting to work on Community-Led Total Sanitation

about four years ago, I have become so used to discussing *mavi*, *caca*, *goo*, *amazi*, *chilu* and *gand* that I have to remind myself frequently, when in non-CLTS company, that others may not feel quite as comfortable talking about it whilst enjoying a plate of food.

But, those engaged in the ‘shit-cleaning’ business as Kamal Kar the pioneer of CLTS likes to call it, know that despite the endless number of anecdotes and funny stories relating to *poo*, this is no laughing matter: shit kills. It is estimated that more than 2 billion people in the developing world practice open defecation, and that every year, the resulting diarrhoeal diseases kill around 1.8 million people, mainly children under the age of five.

Discovering the hidden world of shit

Like many people living in the global North, I’d never given much thought to toilets. I had taken it for granted that when I need to ‘go’, there is a clean and functioning place where I can ‘do my business’, privately and without great hassle. I had

AN INTERNATIONAL GLOSSARY OF SHIT

WORD	LANGUAGE	COUNTRY
Mai	Kikamba/Kikuyu	Kenya
Mari	Kiswahili	Kenya
Bbi	Luganda	Uganda
Ngachin	Turkana	Kenya
Kamafwi	Bukusu	Kenya
Cóco'	Portuguese	Mozambique
amabi	Kikisii	Kenya
Mari	Kitaita	Kenya
Mavh	Kiduruma	Kenya
Chieth	Luó	Kenya
Manyi	Emchewa	Mali

Photo: Petra Bongartz

International Glossary of Shit

been unaware that the simple process of going to the loo and the 'equipment' needed for it are a luxury that sets me apart from more than two thirds of the world's population.

All that has changed dramatically – now I know the word for shit in more than 70 languages – in fact, I've become a collector of them.¹ I am familiar with flying toilets and pee-poo bags.² I have learnt that in some cultures, people believe that men don't shit or that different people's shit should not mix. I know that you can turn a toilet into an orchard.³ And I have talked to people from many different countries, backgrounds and organisations about the 'ins and outs' (there is no end to puns in this line of work!) of defecation. I am acutely aware that sanitation, or rather the lack of

it, is one of the most serious issues developing countries face. In my personal life, when asked at parties 'What is it you do?' my answer, 'I work on shit, literally', often provokes first laughter, then great interest and some shock when I reveal facts and stories about the dire sanitation situation faced by billions of people around the globe.

How it all began

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has a long-standing association with Kamal Kar, the pioneer of CLTS. We got involved in CLTS right from the beginning. Because of flexible funding, we were able to support Kamal to produce the first publication on CLTS, IDS Working Paper 184, 'Subsidy or Self-Respect: Participatory Total Community Sanitation in Bangladesh' (Kar, 2003). We then started a three year DfID-funded research, action learning and networking project on the approach in 2006. We were confronted with the challenge of finding out exactly who was doing what in CLTS in the handful of countries that had started to implement CLTS at that time. So the first task for networking was quite clear: to contact those 'in the know' and ask them for information.

Networking

The word networking often evokes images of people talking over drinks and buffet food or spending hours on 'social networking' websites. But CLTS networking started in a very simple way: I wrote emails to people identified by Kamal as key contacts in several countries (mostly in Asia at that time), introducing our project and request-

¹ See the International Glossary of Shit, p. 15, this issue.

² Flying toilets refer to plastic bags used for defecation and then thrown into ditches, on the roadside, or simply as far away as possible. In particular, this phenomenon is associated with the slums of Nairobi, for example Kibera, where this is one of the main ways of disposing of shit.

³ This refers to the 'arborloo' – a simple pit latrine built over a shallow pit. The slab and superstructure are easily movable so that they can be relocated to another shallow pit once the first one is full. Full pits are topped up with soil and planted with young trees. The end result is what Peter Morgan calls a 'sanitary orchard' of fruit and other trees scattered around the land. For more information see <http://aquamor.tripod.com/ArborLoo2.HTM>.

Box 1: Appreciation from the wider network

Contacts have appreciated the 'valuable write-up from IDS'. Based on feedback received, the website is meeting the needs and interests of many practitioners:

The website... managed by IDS makes it easy to keep abreast of new developments and capitalise on each other's resources. Nilanjana Mukherjee, a Senior Development Consultant for the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme.

I believe that your continuous cooperation and support will enrich CLTS approach in the developing countries like Bangladesh. Paritosh Chandra Sarker, formerly WaterAid Bangladesh.

Thank you for the CLTS update. Indeed you have enriched my scope of knowledge and understanding of new approaches to achieving total sanitation. I pray that you continue updating me since this information is going an extra mile in promotion of sanitation in the community I work. Andrew Cohen Cheptoe, Uganda.

Village Education Resource Centre (VERC), the organisation involved in developing the approach in Bangladesh, wrote to say that:

VERC is very much happy to participate... VERC also congratulates and appreciates your hard job for disseminating CLTS news throughout the whole world.

Kudos on the excellent resources at the CLTS site!

Thanks a lot for keeping the process globally well connected!

ing them to tell us about their work with CLTS. And then we waited for replies. And they came and it soon became clear that those involved were not just happy to share but also keen to link with others who were working with this revolutionary approach.

These days, barely a day goes by when I don't get a request for information on CLTS. There are questions about all aspects of CLTS: training and facilitation, applicability and solutions for different contexts, e.g. flood-prone areas, sandy or rocky soils, emergency and post-conflict situations, how to deal with government resistance, how to support natural leaders... the list goes on. While still serving the purpose of keeping us here at IDS up to date with CLTS in different countries and organisations, networking has expanded to include providing information and materials, and linking people with others who have relevant knowledge. From the early days when I contacted around 20 people by email, the network has grown to comprise a mailing list of more than 1,000 contacts around the world who are either directly involved in CLTS, or have a keen interest in keeping

abreast with the approach as it goes to scale (see Box 1).

Virtual shit

These contacts all receive a bi-monthly e-newsletter which includes an update on the latest additions to the website. In recognition of the fact that most of us are all desperately short on time, the newsletter includes digests of the new materials to help decide what is relevant and worth reading in full. CLTS-related news and alerts of forthcoming events also feature in the newsletter.

One of the key elements of our work is the CLTS website which acts as an online resource centre for information about the approach.⁴ The idea is that it is a 'site by the people for the people' – the majority of resources on the site are materials sent in by practitioners in the more than 35 countries where CLTS has been introduced. All materials are welcome: informal write-ups, reports, evaluations, newspaper articles, research papers and workshop reports etc.

One of the most popular resources is the CLTS Handbook (Kar with Chambers,

⁴ See: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org

Box 2: What's on the CLTS website?

- **The approach**

Background information about CLTS: What is it? Where did it originate? How does it work? Where can I find out more? See:

www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/page/clts-approach

- **Where is CLTS?**

Global map indicating in which countries CLTS has been introduced.

Links to country pages which contain background of CLTS activities and related documents. See:

www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/where

- **Resources**

Online library of CLTS-related materials, searchable by keyword, resource type or topic. Resource types include country papers, information about the approach, case studies, research papers, handbooks and film/audio-visual materials. See: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/resources/latest

- **Manuals and handbooks**

Easy access to key publications such as the CLTS Handbook and the Trainer's Training Guide via links on the menu.

- **Photos and video**

Seeing is believing: photos of all aspects of CLTS on the linked CLTS flickr photostream page. See: www.flickr.com/photos/communityledtotalsanitation/ or via a slideshow: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/page/clts-photos

- **The International Glossary of Shit** is a treasure trove (or should that be a deep pit?) of different words for shit from around the globe. See: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/resource/international-glossary-shit

- **News**

Announcements of events and key occasions such as World Toilet Day.

CLTS and sanitation in the news. See:

www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/news

- **Newsletter subscription**

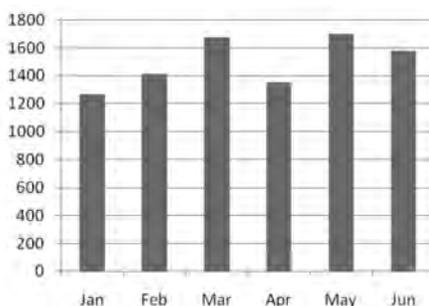
Option of subscribing to the bi-monthly CLTS e-newsletter.

2008) which has been translated into several languages including Hindi, Bengali, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Recently (May 2010), Kamal Kar's new book *Facilitating 'Hands-on' Training Workshops for CLTS: A Trainer's Training Guide* has also been added and looks likely to be another hit with website visitors.⁵ Gradually more

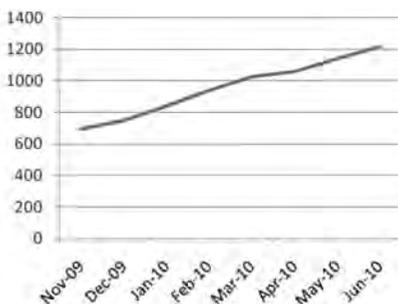
www.communityledtotalsanitation.org

Box 3: CLTS website and mailing list statistics

Visitors: Peaks in visitor numbers can generally be seen during months when the e-newsletter is sent out or there has been a workshop, e.g. Latino San in March, newsletter in May.



Mailing list contacts: Number of people who are subscribed to the CLTS mailing list (subscriptions via the website, via email enquiry or at a workshop). Contacts on the mailing list receive a bi-monthly e-newsletter with updates on what is new on the website as well as other CLTS-related news.



⁵ See: <http://tinyurl.com/clts-training-guide>. Full details in references at the end of this article.

and more materials in languages other than English are making an appearance on the site, too: there are triggering guidelines in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, French and Lao, a CLTS toolkit in Nepali and a facilitator's guide in Chichewa (a language spoken in Malawi).

Being part of positive change: action learning

So, what else do we do besides running a website on CLTS? Networking activities are entwined and overlap with what we call 'action learning'. As the name suggests, this involves 'being involved', participating in what's going on in order to learn from what's happening. In our case, it means:

- staying up to date with what's happening with CLTS;
- keeping in touch with those who are directly involved;
- asking questions and drawing out lessons for wider learning; and
- disseminating these informally (through conversation and email) or more formally in publications.

It means being part of the subject we are studying, rather than an onlooker, a supposedly objective 'traditional' researcher. Like the CLTS facilitators during triggering, we are learners 'accompanying' those directly engaged in CLTS implementation in their reflection and analysis, prompting, probing and asking questions:

... Your questions are opening mind of CLTS facilitator to put into account when practicing. Don't hesitate to send more and more news, ideas or comments regarding CLTS.

Yohana Sekimweri

Our study of CLTS, different from other research, includes reacting to what emerges, and actively intervening with the aim of improving practice, while being reflective about our own role and its biases. And, occasionally, in the spirit of the CLTS, we uncover some institutional shit, profes-

sional and intellectual constipation, both our own and that of others. This seems to be a role that is recognised and appreciated by others:

In creating such an enabling environment for reflection and self-critiquing, the contribution the IDS team has made is quite unique. You [are] deeply committed to CLTS, yet dispassionate enough to look at it critically - which is what we all should be aspiring to do, if we wish to contribute to change and better living conditions.

Tom Palakudiyil, WaterAid.

The common goal of all our networking and action learning activities is to facilitate sharing and learning between people, in order to improve CLTS practice, influence policy and thus ensure quality as CLTS goes to scale. Our hope is that by engaging with and supporting practitioners, we stimulate debate around key aspects of the approach and its implementation, make sure that lessons are learnt and shared. Another aim is to sustain the momentum of the 'CLTS movement' and build critical mass: a well linked and well informed global community of practitioners. Because, as Nilanjana Mukherjee observes,

... Without a global mechanism to keep learners in touch with each other and periodically harvest the learning, it could easily be lost or remain limited within country or project boundaries... IDS [endeavours] to provide us all with ongoing fora to keep track of CLTS-related developments across the world, as well as welcome opportunities to analyse multi-country experiences and draw lessons together.

Let's come together: Sharing and Learning Workshops

One of these fora are the Sharing and Learning Workshops that we have run several times over the last few years, for example at the South Asian Conference on



Photo: Petra Bongartz

Participants at the CLTS in Africa workshop in Mombasa in March 2009 form country groups.

Sanitation (Sacosan) II (2006) and III (2008) and at African Conference on Sanitation and Hygiene (AfricaSan) in 2008. We capitalise on occasions like international and regional conferences, when people come together anyway, to (co)-host and facilitate these one day workshops, usually in collaboration with other organisations like Plan, Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) or the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). More recently, we have also co-convened two longer (one week) workshops: one with Plan Kenya on CLTS in Africa in Mombasa in March 2009, and another with UNICEF, WSP, Plan, WaterAid, Swiss Red Cross, LienAid and others on CLTS in the South East Asia and Pacific region in Phnom Penh in November 2009. Where possible, these workshops also include field visits to learn from practice first hand.

The workshops bring together around 40 to 60 practitioners from communities, government, NGOs and bilateral agencies, 'old hats' as well as newcomers to CLTS, with the aim of sharing experiences and learning from each other. After the Mombasa workshop, one participant commented:

It was quite interesting to share all those experiences on CLTS from such a big variety of resources. I'm sure that, together, we can bring our different developing countries to a high level of sanitation and hygiene by applying the CLTS approach and by sharing knowledge.

Meeting face-to-face, hearing people's stories first hand and, not least of all, laughing together has been vital for creating local and regional networks of practitioners as well as a sense of a global CLTS community. At these workshops, we spend time listening to accounts of what has worked, we reflect honestly on emerging issues and challenges and discuss ideas, innovations, possible solutions and ways forward. These workshops are a great opportunity for networking across organisations, countries and even continents to help to establish useful linkages for the future. As a comment by Innocent Sifuna of Plan Kenya in Turkana illustrates, direct interaction with others working on CLTS is an invaluable experience and creates a lot of momentum: 'I am more energised and focused than ever



Photo: Petra Bongartz

Group photo of participants at the Mombasa workshop.

before following the regional workshop’.

A positive outcome is further collaboration and sharing of experiences, resources and materials beyond the workshop. The time together usually ends with drawing up action plans by country and or organisation, acknowledging that what has been discussed can act as a starting point for change. Learning from the workshops also serves as a basis for learning for all, with dissemination via the website and participants’ own networks in their countries. As Frank Marita of Plan Kenya summed up after the Mombasa workshop in March 2009:

The week-long forum gave all of us an opportunity to share our varied experiences and challenges on CLTS. I believe a good number of us (if not all!) were triggered and now strongly believe that CLTS approach is the way to go... I am sure we are all agreeable that documentation of what we are doing, sharing of best and promising practices and constant networking, are prerequisites for the success of CLTS. Let us keep the fire burning.



Photo: Petra Bongartz

And to celebrate the end of the Mombasa workshop... This cake is literally covered in (international words for) shit.

Becoming a hub: IDS’s involvement in CLTS

To keep the CLTS fire burning is probably an apt description of what we at IDS have been trying to achieve. While some might say that we ‘don’t get our fingers dirty’ – that is we are not directly involved in CLTS implementation on the ground – we believe that we nevertheless have an important role to play. And this has been repeatedly affirmed by those we work with. As Idrissa Doucouré, head of the New Initiatives Unit at WaterAid say:

IDS has been in a unique position over the last few years to bring together INGOs across different sectors who are working on CLTS... IDS has its finger on the pulse of global CLTS initiatives and has played a key role in making linkages across sectors and organisations in order to advance the approach.

We think of ourselves as a global hub. We are positioned at the centre of an intricate spider's web that links many different people around the world: practitioners, NGOs, government staff, researchers and all those other individuals keen to stop open defecation and its terrible consequences for human health and well-being. We seek, collect and disseminate knowledge, research and information on CLTS. We connect those engaged and/or interested in CLTS globally and facilitate mutual processes of sharing and learning from experiences. Whilst other major players in the sector work on sanitation more generally, we are the only one working specifically on CLTS and the CLTS website is the only one dedicated solely to CLTS with a global span.

Because of our close collaboration with the pioneer of CLTS, Kamal Kar, and precisely **because** we are **not** involved in implementation, we are uniquely placed. We are deemed to be 'neutral' by others and have a unique ability to bring together practitioners across countries and organisations:

For practitioners like us, there is always much less time for documentation, reflection and learning. So having IDS to enable this to happen... has enabled insights and lessons to be generated, and later on shared.

Stuart Mulholland, Director of Programmes, Plan UK and Samuel Musyoki, Strategic Director for Programme, Plan Kenya.

Does it work? Successes and challenges

The successes of networking can, like shit itself, often remain hidden. They may not be immediately obvious, and sometimes

cannot directly be attributed to one actor or activity. Nevertheless, they are there. In 2008, I received an enquiry from Tearfund for advice on how to introduce CLTS in Afghanistan. Via email, I linked them with one of our contacts at the Integrated Rural Support Programme (IRSP) in Mardan, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan who have been very involved in CLTS implementation and training. Due to the geographical and cultural proximity, I thought that this might work. And it did. After a number of email exchanges, trainers from IRSP conducted CLTS training in Kapisa Province, in July 2008. Further networking in 2009 meant that Knowledge Links, who are deeply involved in CLTS training in India, has been following up and running further trainings and giving support to Tearfund Afghanistan's CLTS efforts.

Other examples of positive results from networking include the collaboration between Plan and UNICEF on the translation of the CLTS Handbook into French and collaboration of IDS with both to reprint the Handbook in 2009. In the UK, the CLTS Action and Learning Group which arose out of discussions at the launch of the Handbook in April 2008, is an informal but very active group. Representatives of WaterAid, Plan, Tearfund, Practical Action, World Vision and other NGOs with a UK base meet on a quarterly basis to check in and keep each other informed of activities, research, events and news from their respective organisations. At the South East Asia and Pacific regional workshop in Cambodia, participants made plans to establish a regional secretariat on CLTS and discussed learning visits to those countries, for example Indonesia, who have a lot of experience with scaling up CLTS.

Overall, we feel we have made a positive contribution to the increased dialogue between different NGOs and agencies, between practitioners and donors, researchers and practitioners, as well as between advocates of different types of

approaches to sanitation. Others have become interested in using CLTS, for example the British and International Red Cross, who attended an Introduction to CLTS workshop at IDS. They have since sent their International WatSan and Hygiene Promotion Advisor, based in Kenya, to Cambodia, and requested CLTS materials for their annual meeting of representatives of the East and Southern African national societies of the Red Cross. The meeting was the first exposure to CLTS for almost all the participants coming from 12 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa. 'Some got really excited,' reported Libertad Gonzalez, the IRC's International WatSan and Hygiene Promotion Advisor. 'Some countries (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Zimbabwe) decided to establish a working group within their national societies, get in touch with other organisations in their countries who are currently involved in CLTS and seek funding for piloting some small scale projects.'

But despite being well connected and having contacts in many countries and in key organisations, the situation evolves so quickly that it is difficult to know about everything that is going on. Despite reminding contacts to share publications for the website, I often come across relevant materials haphazardly, some time after publication. Relying on others to be proactive in telling us what is happening and sharing materials also has another implication: it can be tricky business getting to the bottom of things and finding out what is really going on. Reports, data and stories do not always match. Who and what do you believe when you have contradictory information from different sources?

Sometimes, expectations exceed our (IDS's) limited capacity and knowledge. We receive requests for us to do trainings, or questions about CLTS that we do not know the answers to. Sometimes we are able to refer the questioner to one of our contacts. At other times, we just have to encourage people to learn by doing.

The very thing that has carved a niche for IDS can also be a challenge. Practitioners, especially NGO, agency and government staff have many conflicting responsibilities and are often also constrained by their institutional set ups. So they may only have limited time for reflecting on and then sharing their experiences with others. And in circumstances where many conflicting demands on staff are made, keeping up the momentum of CLTS work can be tough-going.

But if there is one thing that makes me hopeful that the momentum will not be lost, it is the enthusiasm, passion and dedication of those working on CLTS around the globe and the strong emotions that the approach seems to provoke amongst all who come in contact with it. The language used is a give-away. People talk of 'sceptics and evangelists' and describe themselves as 'converts' or 'fired up'. As workshop after workshop and the ever-increasing email traffic shows, the global CLTS community is alive and kicking, making people talk about shit from Bangladesh to Bolivia, Nepal to Nigeria, Pakistan to the Philippines.

We will continue to ask ourselves and others: does IDS have a role to play? Ultimately, the hope is that others, at national and regional level will pick up what we currently do, and put us out of our jobs. Until then, we remain passionately committed to encouraging and facilitating sharing and learning around CLTS.

So, next time you find yourself in a hotel or workshop venue, pay attention and listen closely to those around you. You might just be lucky and get 'triggered' yourself.

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