



USAID/E3 Water Communications and Knowledge Management (CKM) Project

GLOBAL WATERS RADIO

[Eddy Perez on Lessons Learned and New Trends in the Sanitation Sector](#)

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Global Waters Radio: You are tuned into Global Waters Radio, a podcast series produced by the Water Team at the United States Agency for International Development. The series offers listeners insights from USAID officials, development partners, thought leaders, and experts from across the water sector, as they discuss current USAID water programming and cutting edge research from around the world.

This week on the podcast, Eddy Perez. Eddy is a professor of practice and sanitation at the Center for Global Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene at Emory University's School of Public Health. He discusses the importance of improved sanitation in rural areas, and continuing challenges facing the sanitation sector. And at the helm of this week's podcast with Eddy is WASH Knowledge Management Specialist Dan Campbell, so Dan, take it away.

Today, we're talking to Eddy Perez from Emory University about his career and insights on sanitation. Just to start off, could you give us a brief summary of your work and career in sanitation?

Eddy Perez: Thank you for having me on this podcast. I'm currently what's called a professor of practice at Emory University in their School of Public Health. I bring in good practical experience from over 30 years of working in both policies and programs with USAID, the World Bank, and NGOs on WASH in general, but in the last 15 years or so, specifically on sanitation.

I have been with Emory for about a year, and before that I was with the Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank, where we had a partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for a large learning project on scaling up rural sanitation. So we did a very evidence-based approach to learning and improving approaches to both create demand for sanitation as well as improving supply for sanitation products and services, particularly for the poor in rural areas. And before that, I worked for over 10 years at the old USAID-funded WASH Project and the Environmental Health Project, where we provided technical assistance to AID in Washington and the missions, as well

as their development partners, like UNICEF, in both technical assistance as well as learning and improving their programs.

GWR: Great. Tell me, are there new areas of sanitation research or new sanitation projects that you think are important?

EP: It has been very interesting and very positive that I've seen a new generation of USAID-funded projects that are focusing on sanitation, both country-level as well as global, and each of them have a strong learning component. I really want to recognize that, and appreciate efforts by USAID to do that.

As most of the listeners know, during the MDG era, when the MDGs were first announced, there really was no goal for sanitation—it was an afterthought. So it was particularly rewarding and exciting in the SDGs to see that there is a specific goal for sanitation and behavior change and eliminating open defecation. Having said that, it's a very ambitious goal, and the major difference between MDGs and SDGs is that it's focusing on sanitation for everyone, not just for some. And implicit in that is a progressive reduction of inequality in access.

And when we look at who has access now, the poorest have the least access, particularly in rural areas. So the SDGs really focus on how to reach the poorest, and they also focus on safe sanitation, which has to do with improving in urban areas in particular what is called the sanitation value chain for on-site sanitation, to ensuring that sludge from on-site sanitation is properly managed and disposed of.

I give that context because I think that much of the learning that needs to go on now is learning that will help countries really achieve the SDGs, and some of the key “learning buckets” as I call them, is research on financing policies to make durable sanitation more affordable for the poorest, including publicly financed subsidies for household sanitation in rural areas, and potentially research about how to integrate rural sanitation programs with other conditional cash-transfer programs such as nutrition programs and family livelihood programs. And that's all in the context of reducing inequality in reaching the poorest.

Related to that is the research on reducing the urban inequality in sanitation access and safe management of sludge, especially in slums. Some of the last couple years there has been an emerging focus on using the private sector to help with that safe fecal sludge management, and I concur that that is an important part of that. But the private sector alone will not be able to reach those at the bottom of the pyramid and the poorest, and that has to be done in partnership with the public, and again we're probably talking about some sort of financial subsidies or use of public funding.

I think that in terms of major lessons learned in the last few years in the sanitation sector, I think the major learning compared to say five years ago is that simply training masons to build better latrines was not really producing enough supply of quality latrines and services to meet the growing demand for improved sanitation, so that I think our

biggest learning is that if we want an effective private sector engagement in sanitation marketing, countries, local governments, and development partners need to move beyond mason training. And I think we've seen that learning over and over again, in many, many countries by multiple countries and development partners.

GWR: Do you have any additional comments you would like to make about your current work or your upcoming research?

EP: Well I still do want to just note a couple of the challenges that I see as we move forward. One is in terms of rural sanitation, we have seen that CLTS has proven effective in changing behaviors, particularly around stopping open defecation. But what our evidence and data shows is that even when it's successful, it's only successful about 50 percent of the time. So a major challenge as we move forward is to find an approach to changing behaviors and creating demand when CLTS-type of approaches do not work. So, again, in the context of reaching everyone, we have to find approaches that complement CLTS. CLTS is good, but it's not good 100 percent of the time.

I think the other sort of major challenge we have is that to progressively reduce inequalities in sanitation access. That means reaching what I would call the high-hanging fruit. These are harder challenges. Often these are in fact communities that are harder to reach, and very likely are going to cost more to reach them, to change their behaviors, to create demand, to improve supply, yet we're still getting pressures by external donors to be cost-effective. And so, I think that one of the challenges we have as a community is to say if we want to reduce inequity and we want to reach the poorest, this is what it is going to cost. And if it costs more, we have to be able to show good value for money in how that's justified in terms of reducing inequity. And then make that argument with government financing as well as donor financing.

GWR: For more information on Eddy Perez and Emory University's Center for Global Safe WASH, please head online to www.cgswash.org. And if you have any topics you'd like to see covered in an upcoming podcast, you can always reach us at waterteam@usaid.gov.

This is Global Waters Radio.