

# Adopting CLTS: is your organisation ready? Analysing organisational requirements

# 9

by JEAN-FRANÇOIS SOUBLIÈRE

## Introduction

This paper draws on my experiences as an Engineers Without Borders Canada staff member. From February 2008 to October 2009, I was seconded to WaterAid Burkina Faso. When I joined their team, the NGO had decided to adopt CLTS as their main approach to promote sanitation in rural areas. My role was to support the organisation and bring a critical perspective as they moved from their previous subsidised approach to CLTS.

The paper analyses the practical implications of adopting CLTS for facilitators, managers and organisations. It is particularly relevant to development managers who have heard of CLTS and would like to implement, support or finance the approach. It does not introduce the fundamentals of CLTS: organisations wishing to familiarise themselves with the approach are invited to consult resources already available.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that not every organisation is ready to adopt CLTS without reassessing

its organisational culture, field-level practices, organisational processes and institutional context. The argument is developed by:

- discussing the reasons that can motivate – or discourage – development agencies to drop their previous approaches to sanitation and take up CLTS, and
- analysing the different implications of CLTS on the way development agencies operate.

The key messages of this paper are summarised in Box 1.

## Dropping previous approaches

In 2008, after reviewing the effectiveness and sustainability of its sanitation programme, WaterAid Burkina Faso decided to abandon its subsidised approach. The organisation noticed that the only activities which progressed quickly were those that implementing partners supervised and subsidised (e.g. pouring and installing concrete latrine slabs).

<sup>1</sup> Many resources can be found on the official CLTS website: [www.communityledtotalsanitation.org](http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org)

**Box 1: Summary of the key messages**

Parting with previous approaches	Implications for organisational culture	Implications for field-level implementation	Implications for organisational processes	Implications for institutional context
<p>1. Subsidised sanitation programmes follow the pace of development agencies rather than the pace of communities</p> <p>2. Previous understanding of behaviour change mechanisms lacked sophistication</p>	<p>1. Believe in every community's capacity to solve their own sanitation challenges, by their own means and at their own pace</p> <p>2. Define a programme's success in terms of behaviour change, instead of latrine construction and budget spending</p>	<p>1. Value the field workers and invest in their professional growth so they succeed as facilitators</p> <p>2. Redefine success indicators and redesign monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: they should be participatory and community-based</p>	<p>1. Make planning and budgeting processes flexible enough to let the communities change at their own pace</p> <p>2. Reshape accountability mechanisms in a way that empowers field staff to share valuable learning</p>	<p>1. Request funding for organisational development and more flexible contracts</p> <p>2. Advocate for national policies and standards that will encourage communities to take ownership over their sanitation challenges</p>

Indeed, the pace of implementation would drastically slow down when households had to build the walls of their own latrine – i.e. unsubsidised and without supervision. Through ongoing awareness sessions, implementing partners provided the community with continued technical support until eventually the latrines would be totally built. Yet, at the end of the project, awareness sessions would stop. Masons who had been trained to pour latrine slabs received no continued business to construct new latrines after the project finished.

WaterAid Burkina Faso is not unique. In recent years, growing concerns about the effectiveness of hygiene and sanitation programmes have challenged conventional approaches. In most sanitation programmes, the use of latrines does not become universal practice, nor do a majority of the targeted community members adopt complementary hygiene practices. These shortcomings greatly impede widespread health improvements in communities. Two factors may help explain such

mixed results:

1. the pace of these projects; and
2. the behaviour change mechanisms used.

1. Subsidised sanitation programmes follow the pace of development agencies rather than the pace of communities

Subsidies are believed to be necessary to achieve ambitious quantitative targets in a fixed time period. However, this 'quick outputs' mentality skews the definition of success and adds a tremendous pressure at the field level. These consequences can be illustrated with an example from WaterAid Burkina Faso.

In a past project – before the introduction of CLTS – the NGO was contracted to build 3,000 subsidised latrines in three years: approximately three latrines per day. Although initial plans included raising community awareness of the risks of open defecation and hygiene promotion, the main measure of success was the number of newly built facilities. Fostering and evaluating behaviour change through commu-

nity interaction was not a top priority.

Moreover, the deadlines to achieve these quantitative goals placed tremendous pressure on field staff. Some field workers working on subsidised programmes told me that they sometimes felt that families were building their latrine just to stop them bothering their community. This discourages a sense of ownership – community members often refer to new latrines as belonging to a certain project or aid organisation. In this situation, the presence of a latrine is far from guaranteeing the adoption of healthy hygiene practices.

## 2. Previous understanding of behaviour change mechanisms lacked sophistication

Conventional approaches place a great emphasis on knowledge of hygienic practices (e.g. with the use of PHAST tools) and on provision of financial means (e.g. with subsidised materials).<sup>2</sup> However, practice shows that **to know** and **to be able to** are not the only ingredients necessary for a person **to change** their behaviour. Adopting a new habit is a complex socio-cultural phenomenon that includes both an individual and a collective dimension. At the individual level, the self-respect and dignity that come with proper sanitation (in other words, the sense of disgust and shame felt at open defecation) are also important incentives to change. Collectively, people will be more motivated to change behaviour if they perceive that their choices are respectable and if their previous practices are not condoned anymore by their peers. Few people would adopt a new behaviour that places them at risk of marginalisation or exclusion.

In a nutshell, CLTS aims to minimise external incentives (e.g. subsidies and pressure from project targets) and foster endogenous incentives (e.g. human nature and social norms). Acknowledging these facts, WaterAid Burkina Faso followed many other organisations by deciding in

2008 to adopt the CLTS approach as its main approach to sanitation.

## Adopting the CLTS approach

Community engagement is the central tenet of the CLTS approach. And to truly achieve this, the approach seeks to reduce the incentives from outsiders in order to promote an action from the community itself. The role of development agencies is therefore to create enabling conditions for communities to commit themselves to end their sanitation problem – at their own pace – for their own reasons. With such a dynamic at play, the development agency ceases to be ‘in control’ of the community’s change process. Therefore, adopting the CLTS approach could prove to be a true paradigm shift. Such fundamental changes have implications for:

- (A) organisational culture
- (B) field-level practices
- (C) organisational processes and
- (D) institutional context.

### (A) Implications for organisational culture

The development sector is dynamic and discourses succeed one another rapidly. For example, ‘donors’ are now referred to as ‘development partners’. Among the sensitisation techniques, ‘Information, education and communication (IEC)’ has been superseded by ‘Behaviour change communication (BCC)’. Most NGOs do not develop individual ‘projects’ anymore, but include them in a unified ‘programme’. Changes of this kind are numerous, but experience also shows that introducing a new **rhetoric** does not always lead to a change in the essential **practice**. And when a new approach is put forward, its differences engender many debates – which sometimes cloud the need for more fundamental changes.

The decision to adopt CLTS and abandon subsidies for the construction of family latrines is breaking with common

<sup>2</sup> Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) is a methodology devised by the World Health Organisation to promote healthy hygiene practices.

### Box 2: Examples of typical arguments and counter-arguments regarding ending subsidies and CLTS

<b>Argument</b>	Subsidies rarely reach the poorest of the poor. Ending subsidies will make our interventions more equitable for everyone.
<b>Rebuttal</b>	The inequity will remain anyway. The fact that we choose one intervention zone instead of another makes our intervention inequitable.
<b>Argument</b>	By letting communities build and finance their latrines by themselves, we assure a more sustainable use of the sanitation facilities.
<b>Rebuttal</b>	I don't share your point of view. Latrines built 'at discount' with lower technical standards are not physically sustainable.
<b>Argument</b>	It will allow for substantial budget savings in our programme if we stop subsidising.
<b>Rebuttal</b>	I disagree. CLTS will cost as much if not more – especially with all the additional follow-ups needed.

practice. This change has been one of the most debated topics at WaterAid Burkina Faso, both internally and with its partners or other stakeholders. The reasons for abandoning household latrine subsidy are numerous, but counter-arguments also exist, as shown in Box 2.

Even today, the issue of subsidy receives considerable attention and is still hotly debated among NGOs, donors and the government – something which greatly hinders the spread of CLTS in Burkina Faso.

In my opinion however, all these discussions around the merits or otherwise of subsidies are diverting our attention from the key benefits of CLTS:

1. the profound impact of community-led development; and
2. a genuine sanitation behaviour change.

1. Believe in every community's capacity to solve their own sanitation challenges, by their own means and at their own pace

It is increasingly understood and accepted among development agencies that subsidies hinder local and collective action. Indeed, community subsidies create an expectation of and, over time, dependency on external assistance. During CLTS pre-triggering it is not uncommon for communities to ask upfront what the facilitators have come to the village to offer them. This attitude is the first challenge that has to be faced when parting

with past approaches and adopting CLTS.

For example, the first village triggered in Burkina Faso initially responded very well to the CLTS approach. In a couple of weeks, many households had dug their latrine pits. But progress was slowing down. After multiple follow-up visits, it became apparent that all progress had stopped. A meeting was organised with the community to understand the situation: even if it was clear from the start that they had to construct latrines on their own, the community members were still secretly hoping for subsidies. It was stressed again that WaterAid had no funds for this, but that technical support could be offered. After some basic calculations, the community agreed that they could afford the latrines and that it was better for them not to wait for a subsidised project. Now that they have started pouring slabs and finishing many latrines, they feel proud of their accomplishment, especially since some neighbouring communities think that they did receive a subsidy.

After decades of subsidised interventions, which have reinforced dependency attitudes, few communities will voluntarily or spontaneously mobilise themselves to change their sanitation situation. CLTS breaks the cycle. Communities are in charge. They analyse their sanitation issues by themselves. They decide which solution is best for them according to their own

means. They set their own targets and work at their own pace. CLTS reminds organisations that development starts from within.

2. Define a programme's success in terms of behaviour change, instead of latrine construction and budget spending

In previous approaches, the success of sanitation programmes were mainly evaluated with very mechanistic metrics – e.g. the number of constructed latrines and the percentage of budget spent. But CLTS requires us to define success differently. The main metric for success is a behaviour change: the end of open defecation.

This change was highlighted during one of WaterAid's quarterly meetings with its implementing partners. Out of seven partners, only one was doing CLTS during the pilot phase. And like all the other partners, they were mainly reporting on the number of constructed latrines so far according to their budget. Another implementing partner did well to point out that they were expecting something different. To what extent was the community mobilised? What shift was seen in people's attitudes? What was the behaviour of those yet without a latrine? Although everyone agreed these were valid points to raise, these questions were left unanswered.

This discussion reminded WaterAid and its first CLTS implementer that they still had to unlearn how they would normally define success. For the other implementing partners, who still had not experienced CLTS, they were left wondering if CLTS would really change the way they operated, or whether it was just 'business as usual' with yet another label.

Organisations adopting CLTS will need to redefine what success truly means to them. Project outputs, although convenient to measure, can no longer be the main indicator of success. With CLTS aiming for behaviour change, there is a greater need for organisations to evaluate their project outcomes. Are the hygiene and sanitation

behaviours any different? Is health really improving? Are communities better off? CLTS reminds organisations that sanitation is not about latrines. It is about people.

## B. Implications for field-level practices

Implementing the CLTS approach can be broadly summarised in a few steps. Initially, field workers approach a community and attempt to facilitate – or trigger – a mobilisation process to change sanitation behaviours. Secondly, they support community-led initiatives through follow-up visits. Finally, the community reaches open defecation free (ODF) status – by their own means and by setting their own deadlines.

Previous subsidies approaches had some participatory elements (e.g. hygiene sensitisation with PHAST tools, poverty profiles to allocate subsidies, etc.). But CLTS is not about community engagement in a development project. It is entirely participatory and communities are in charge. Field staff no longer have something tangible to hand out like a subsidy. The power to achieve or not achieve the project goals is entirely transferred to the community. Which means that field workers must act as facilitators, and only as facilitators. This implies two major changes in field-level practices:

1. field workers play the single most determining role in the success of the intervention; and
2. the community itself must define what success means for them.

1. Value the field workers and invest in their professional growth so they succeed as facilitators

The transition from a subsidised approach to CLTS may raise objections from field staff. This was the case for WaterAid Burkina Faso, where some field staff members from their implementing partners shared with me: 'Will we lose our jobs

if communities decide not to build latrines?<sup>3</sup>

For CLTS to be truly effective, the knowledge, skills and attitudes of field staff are of crucial importance. Organisations adopting CLTS must be prepared to provide its field staff with practical hands-on training. Moreover, efforts must be made to monitor how well the facilitators apply their new skills. Human resources management practices might need to change in order to provide field staff with continuous on-the-job training and coaching.

Usually seen at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy, the field workers must be recognised as the key to the success of the CLTS approach. This is unlikely to change in the short term, yet an organisation adopting CLTS must ask itself if it is prepared to value and invest in its field staff.

2. Redefine success indicators and redesign monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: they should be participatory and community-based

Latrine coverage has long been the main indicator of success, and it will be difficult for an organisation to drop its old habits and develop performance criteria focused on behaviour change. CLTS challenges organisations to measure outcomes instead of outputs. With the end of open defecation as the main metric for success, the organisation will need to be creative in order to redesign its monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Instead of top-down surveys, participatory tools can be explored with communities to capture the changes that CLTS will have catalysed. Many ideas could be tried out, for example:

- Compare one season or year to another and notice changes in terms of outdoor

smells, presence of flies, cleanliness of children, etc.

- Ask reputable community members to rank households based on their hygiene practices.
- Mapping households with and without latrines, and identify those where people still practice open defecation.
- Ask children to survey defecation sites and to closely track open defecators.
- Capture significant stories where individuals and groups have changed their attitudes and behaviours, even beyond hygiene and sanitation.

In any cases, the most important metric remains the end of open defecation. However, only community members can really know if that goal has been achieved or not. The real question for an organisation is: are we ready to let the communities choose their own indicators of success and the best way to evaluate themselves?

### C. Implications for organisational processes

Several organisational factors affect field staff capacity building and the quality of CLTS implementation. Special attention must be paid to:

1. ease the planning and budgeting process; and
2. benefit from learning about field realities.

1. Make the planning and budgeting processes flexible enough to let the communities change at their own pace

Organisations must be flexible when it comes to programme design and planning, as space must be created to accommodate the complexity of rural realities. Even though CLTS uses standard participatory tools and processes, triggering outcomes can be unpredictable. From one triggering

<sup>3</sup> WaterAid as an international organisation does not directly implement projects at the community level. Instead, their model is to work through local organisations who have a better understanding of the local field realities.



to another, the level of commitment and conviction of a community will vary.<sup>4</sup> It is even possible that the triggering process will completely be ineffective in some cases.

Therefore, the follow-up strategy should be adapted according to the response and plans of each specific community. Are extension workers being creative, or are they working as if all communities were identical?

Such complexity may be difficult to manage for organisations that are used to designing development interventions through the linearity of certain project design tools, such as the logical framework. In the context of CLTS, programme design must include timelines that allow sufficient time and flexibility to observe behaviour change. Has enough time and money been allocated to follow-ups and monitoring, and do you have a buffer?

Easing planning and budgeting requirements will also make it possible for field staff to seize emerging opportunities to build community capacity or stimulate change in initially resistant communities. Are your staff typically encouraged or discouraged to reallocate budget lines?

Planning processes need to be linked to learning and accountability systems and allow time for sharing and critical thinking that is essential to learning to improve practice. Otherwise, thinking critically and sharing experiences get dropped from everyone's agenda. If your staff are being held accountable for their results, is the same rigour applied to their professional growth?

These could prove to be particularly challenging tensions for complex organisations like international NGOs, where flexibility typically decreases with the need for higher accountability checks and controls.

2. Reshape accountability mechanisms in a way that empowers field staff to share valuable learning

Organisations must recognise that shifting from a top-down to a bottom-up approach – such as CLTS – will have implications for organisational systems and practices, particularly related to organisational learning. An organisation adopting CLTS must capture learning from the field so that it can be shared amongst all facilitators and stimulate innovations in CLTS practice. In addition, unequal power relations in the relationships between international organisations and implementing partners can make dialogue too prescriptive. These dynamics stifle the openness and critical reflection that is essential for the kind of learning that CLTS requires.

For example, typical organisational dialogue spaces, such as review meetings, may inadequately facilitate learning exchange. In the case of WaterAid Burkina Faso, power relationships in quarterly meetings with implementing partners had to be managed carefully. We introduced a neutral chairman during these meetings, who was responsible for making sure everyone had an equal opportunity to have a voice, regardless of the hierarchy within the organisation. Learning sessions and peer-to-peer exchanges were also introduced to address the field staffs' needs.

In addition, WaterAid Burkina Faso's reporting template had to be revised. Previously, a strong emphasis was put on describing activities achieved. Very little was said about the changes created, the challenges encountered, what was learnt, and what could be done differently next time. The reporting template was simplified and reflective questions were introduced to also evaluate behaviour change and promote a critical field-level analysis

<sup>4</sup> In CLTS language, four reactions following triggering are typically described: Matchbox in a gas station; Promising flames; Scattered sparks; and Damp matchbox. For more discussion on how to deal with different responses see also Triggering, Tips for trainers, this issue.

of the programme's progress.

These changes were well received and have helped to enable learning to emerge from the field. However, there is still a lot to be done to reduce power inequalities between directors and staff at the field-level.

#### D. Implications for the institutional context

The institutional context is the environment in which an organisation evolves. It can be seen as the 'rules of the game', which can influence the organisation's ability to implement CLTS. The most relevant institutional factors include – but are not limited to – financing practices and government policies. To strengthen the institutional context for CLTS, development agencies must advocate for:

1. funding to be more flexible and include support for organisational development; and
2. national policies and standards that will encourage communities to take ownership over their sanitation challenges.

##### 1. Request funding for organisational development and more flexible contracts

Donors have a big role to play in helping organisations adapt their practices to enable successful CLTS. However, little funding is normally granted to increase the organisational effectiveness of the implementing agency. Indeed, donors usually favour proposals that promise large numbers of new sanitation facilities. This can encourage organisations to count latrines rather than assess behaviour change, thus undermining the whole CLTS approach.

An organisation adopting the CLTS approach must consider the community-led nature of behaviour change outcomes they are aiming for when they negotiate result targets with their donors. However, to ensure quality field interventions, donors would gain by investing in the

organisational development of their recipient structures to deliver programmes like CLTS.

Moreover, since the CLTS process outcomes cannot be entirely controlled by the implementing agency, donors should also consider using more flexible contracts to accommodate the somewhat unpredictable nature of results. Openness to change throughout the project and having an understanding of the operational realities will allow donors to adapt their own support of the implementing agency to enable the success of CLTS. This kind of flexibility requires a partnership based on deep level of trust and mutual understanding.

2. Advocate for national policies and standards that will encourage communities to take ownership over their sanitation challenges

Development agencies adopting the CLTS approach should advocate for national standards and policies that enable effective implementation and sustained outcomes. For example, government standards in Burkina Faso prescribe only four acceptable models of latrines for rural communities. This restricts the communities' freedom to choose based on their preferences and available resources. Moreover, the qualifying latrine models are very expensive in rural Burkina Faso, relative to average incomes, which makes the government's policy of providing a 90% subsidy rate essential. Through this rural sanitation programme, the government is hoping to accelerate the pace at which the MDGs are achieved and also encourage stakeholders to provide sustainable facilities. But for communities who are not lucky enough to be served by such a programme, these standards may suggest that sanitation is a luxury for which the poor do not have the right, and they are better off to wait their turn.



**Box 3. Questions to assess if your organisation is ready to adopt CLTS**

- Is your organisation ready to try new behaviour change mechanisms? Can your staff talk openly about shit? Do your staff feel comfortable using emotional reactions like shame and self-respect to change sanitation behaviours?
- How does your organisation perceive rural communities? Does most of your staff think they need external assistance to build latrines? Or that they have the resources and capacity to address sanitation issues on their own?
- Who defines your organisation's success indicators? Are you ready to let the communities define what hygiene and sanitation means for them?
- What role are the field workers playing in your organisation? Are you ready to invest in their skills? Do your organisation's managers have a participatory leadership style?
- How comfortable are your implementing partners or your field staff to share their successes and challenges? What needs to change in your actual accountability mechanisms to capture valuable learning from the field?
- What does success mean for your organisation? Spent budget? Built infrastructures? Changed behaviours? What influences the most the way you take your day-to-day decisions?
- How are your organisation's annual targets and timelines decided? Is it more **top-down** or **bottom-up**? Would your organisation be ready to let go and give the communities control over the work plan and timelines?
- How flexible are your planning and budgeting processes? How easily can you change your work plan? How easily can you reallocate a budget line? How free are you to seize new opportunities?
- What kind of dialogue does your organisation have with its donors? Do they understand your organisation's and the field's realities? How flexible are they? How financially independent are you?
- What are the national policies regarding sanitation? Are they allowing communities to decide how they should build their latrines? Without subsidies? If not, how committed are you to work with the government and influence the policies?

**Conclusion**

The CLTS approach has gained momentum and attracted the attention of many development agencies who wish to adopt it for their national context. The flourishing literature now available on CLTS illustrates this trend.

However, from one adaptation to another, the CLTS approach is susceptible to unfavourable distortions if development agencies fail to internalise its core concepts. And to avoid foreseeable distortions, organisations should be reminded to:

- refrain from introducing subsidies or specifying latrine models later on in the CLTS process;
- avoid classroom training and maximise experiential learning; and
- stop measuring mainly latrine outputs and find creative ways to observe attitude and behaviour changes.

And as the CLTS approach is deeply

rooted in participatory principles, it also reminds organisations that development starts with people and must come from within.

Adopting CLTS raises many questions that development agencies will need to answer – see e.g. Box 3. Hopefully, these questions will prompt development agencies to:

- reassess the way they operate and change their organisational culture;
- adopt different field-level practices;
- reshape their organisational processes; and
- advocate for an enabling institutional context.

For many organisations and individuals this will require a radical change, meaning CLTS could prove to be the entry point for a profound transformation of the aid industry.

---

## CONTACT DETAILS



Jean-François Soublière  
African Programme Staff  
Engineers Without Borders Canada  
601-366 Adelaide Street West  
Toronto (Ontario) M5V 1R9  
Canada  
Tel: +1 416 481 3693  
Fax: +1 416 352 5360  
Email: [jf.soubliere@gmail.com](mailto:jf.soubliere@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.ewb.ca](http://www.ewb.ca)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully thank Mme Rosine Clarisse Baghnyan and M. Yéréfalo Mallé (WaterAid Burkina Faso) for their support, insights and constructive feedback. Also, I am very grateful to M. Jean Claude Bambara, M. Ferdinand Kaboré, Mme Fatoumata Nombré, M. Abdoukarim Sawadogo (Association DAKUPA) for making me a member of their facilitation team.