Culture and development

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Examples of cultural difference

Color and meaning in Bangladesh

When some organizations identified wells in Bangladesh as contaminated with arsenic, they were marked - red dots for bad wells and green dots for good wells. However there are behavioral barriers: people don't like unfamiliar wells; they can't see the effects of arsenic immediately; and people without experience of traffic lights may not know that red is bad and green is good.[1] In fact, Bangladeshis like the color red more than green.[2]

Another issue is red-green color blindness, though this mainly affects men, whereas women are the ones who most often collect water.

Blogger (and law professor) Eugene Volokh writes:

Not that this means you shouldn't do anything -- on the facts reported in this article, it seems pretty clear that it's better to have today's arsenic problem than yesterday's cholera problem (but then again, the article doesn't give enough information to say that for sure). All I draw from the article is that public health and development planners -- and any policymaker -- should have a sense of humility about the solutions they propose.[1]
Influencing culture

Cultures inevitably change, with or without the involvement of outsiders. However, having people from outside the community in positions of respect and influence can have a major effect. Information and communication technologies also have a major effect. This leads to many dilemmas. An important question for any development program is: is this effect positive?

Cultural changes can also be deliberate. An example is the "No Toilet, No Bride" campaign started by the Indian government, to create a very practical pressure to provide sanitation.\[3\]

Notes and references=

1. The Volokh Conspiracy (archive) by Eugene Volokh (Law Professor at UCLA). The comments are based on an article written in German, in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.
2. Statement made in talk by Peter Kelly of AusAID to an Engineers Without Borders (NSW) meeting, October 11 2006
3. Indian brides herald a toilet revolution guardian.co.uk, 28 February 2011

See also

- Orangi Pilot Project

External links

- RDI Cambodia’s Studio Projects Using methods such as storytelling and karaoke to spread information.
- No Average Days - a blog about teaching reproductive health and gender in rural Bangladesh, with many observations on culture.
- Equity for a Small Planet - links to audio of Arif Hasan of the Orangi Pilot Project, Pakistan, talking about the disparity between local governance and the way people live, using the city of Karachi as an example. Listen (RealAudio, streaming)
- Culture Matters, the Peace Corps workbook on cultural understanding.

Blogs

- No Average Days - Teaching reproductive health and gender in rural Bangladesh.
- Pyjama Samsara - Relief/development/latrines in post-tsunami Nias, Indonesia.