Sanitation services for poo or people?
Towards a ‘people-centred’ definition of sanitation services
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Key messages
• Sanitation services are often defined in technocratic terms – e.g. as ‘the containment, transport, treatment and reuse of human excreta’.
• The field of service design define services in terms of the experiences users have across a series of touch points – the places and spaces where user and service provider meet.
• From a service design perspective, the ‘containment, transport, treatment and reuse of human excreta’, describes a service for poo rather than for people. The poo experience being contained, transported, treated and reused.
• A ‘people-centred’ perspective on sanitation services brings our attention to how people experience ‘becoming aware of, joining, using and eventually leaving a sanitation services’. The quality of such experiences not only influence quality of life, but also impacts the sustainability of service provision.

Why is this important
Despite a wide recognition that sanitation services are distinct from infrastructure, the sector often define services in technocratic terms – e.g. as the ‘containment, transport, treatment and reuse of human excreta’ – a technological process for treating wastewater. To better understand and conceptualise the difference between sanitation services and technology, an alternative service definition that goes beyond technology is therefore needed.

Sanitation services for poo
Sanitation services are often defined as the ‘containment, transport, treatment and reuse of human excreta’. From a service design perspective, this defines a sanitation service for the poo – the poo experience being contained, transported, treated and reused – people do not.

From this perspective, the quality a service is judged by how many of these four phases are included in service provision.

Sanitation services for people
Drawing inspiration from the field of service design, a ‘people-centred’ sanitation service can be defined as the experiences people have ‘becoming aware of, joining, using (potentially developing) and eventually leaving’ the service.

The quality of a sanitation service from this perspective is characterised by how well people’s experiences match their expectations.

Project
The ‘people-centred’ sanitation service definition was used to explore how urban communities in Indonesia experience community-scale (decentralised) sanitation services. This was done by engaging community members in mapping their experiences becoming aware of, joining, using (potentially developing) and leaving the service. In the pictures below members of two communities are in the process of mapping their experiences through a simple mapping tool developed for this purpose.

Outcomes
Taking a ‘people-centred’ service perspective brought our attention to for example:
• How people’s experience of sanitation services goes far beyond the smell and cleanliness of their latrine. I also includes e.g. the accessibility of government departments, how inquiries to these departments are being handled and whether appropriate expectations are set during the awareness and joining phases.
• How peoples’ previous negative experiences with their government directly can impact their trust and belief in government in terms of delivering sanitation services.
• While becoming aware and joining a sanitation service, people build expectations of the service. If these expectations do not match their later experiences this might lead to frustrations.