

In Memory of John Kalbermatten



The Water and Sanitation Sector has lost an outstanding personality

John Kalbermatten, a real pioneer and visionary in the Water and Sanitation Sector over the last three

decades, died on 26 February 2009 in Bethlehem, PA (USA) at the age of 77.

He was born in Lucerne, Switzerland, and had worked as a professional engineer in many parts of the world before he was appointed in the late 1970s as the Water Supply and Sanitation Advisor of the World Bank in Washington, DC. When John realised that World Bank-financed sanitation projects were often not reaching a large segment of the population, the poor, he initiated several research projects with the overall aim to determine the best level of service to be provided at a cost compatible with the family income of the population to be served and the most cost-effective technology in providing that level of service. One of the outcomes of these projects were some truly ground-breaking publications such as three books on Appropriate Sanitation Alternatives¹ and several reports published in the World Bank Series "Appropriate Technology for Water Supply and Sanitation". In 1978, John

Kalbermatten obtained funds from UNDP for establishing the Technology Advisory Group (TAG) to put the lessons of the research project into practice. All these initiatives and projects came together in later years to become the World Bank-funded Water and Sanitation Programme.

After his early retirement from the World Bank in 1986, John continued as a private consultant for 14 years and followed developments in the sector with great interest and offered his professional advice to his many colleagues and friends until a few months ago.

John Kalbermatten was also instrumental in several global initiatives. He and a few other visionaries invented and promoted the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD) at the first UN-sponsored World Water Conference in Mar Del Plata, Argentina, in 1977. John always promoted within the UN family the idea of new international arrangements to keep sharp focus of WSS services for the poor. He and a few like-minded thinkers from multilateral and bilateral funding agencies first proposed a sectoral Collaborative Council at a conference in Interlaken in 1987. That idea also took root and was further developed to the Water and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), which continues to be a model of sector collaboration between individuals

and organisations concerned with water, sanitation and hygiene for poor people in developing countries.

Over the years, many people at Sandec, including myself, had the privilege to know John personally and to work with him on different occasions. It was always an extremely enriching and inspiring experience, both professionally and personally. John inspired me and the work of Sandec in many different ways and I will always remember him with gratitude for his outstanding and warm personality and for his enormous contribution and outstanding achievements for the benefit of the underprivileged.

¹ A Technical and Economic Appraisal; A Planning and Design Manual (both published in 1982 by John Hopkins University Press); Sanitation and Disease: Health Aspects of Excreta and Wastewater Management (John Wiley & Sons, 1983).

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