washcost calculator

Posted by christoph - 16 Dec 2012 13:56

Dear all, especially washcost calculator development participants, dear Jeske Verhoeven.

I'm a bit worried about the wash calculator and I would kindly ask to an answer to my post about the washcost infosheet2. When I read about the notice on the upcoming

wash cost calculator I really got nervous because the probable and logic base would be the infosheet information (and more detailed numbers). As I criticized these numbers and the generalizing approach I do have concerns about the possibility of a GOOD calculator tool.

A calculator in an area where there is almost no reliable information available is on one hand a very good activity when it puts together lots of costs and good sepcific data, but on the other hand … exactly as there is no reliable information available it can be very dangerous. Much more as we are talking about a tool which is intended to be used not in just one country.

I think it might be good to do a "testdrive" in one country where there was good information collected. (you might have done that already). This test drive could be published and the decisive parameters could be expressed with a sensitivity analysis. On this basis it could be possible that experts (expert = people who do understand what influence have numbers and they do not use default values for the sensitive parameters) do their testing.

With great interest I read the post by Bismark

which has attached some papers

the first (of August 2011)

ghana background paper

has a table 2 which says basic service is service for ALL family members.

I consider that definition right. In parallel there is the table 2 in the publication

ghana sanitation

That says again that if "some family members have access" it is enough for basic access! In my opinion it changed from right to wrong for the definition of basic service (see my post about the infosheet).

So the basis for the calculator is not right.

My main concern about the calculator is the false security of a “tool” in hands of somebody who is validating ... “50 governments, multilaterals, training institutions, International NGOs and donors are either using or planning to use the life-cycle costs approach.”

There are many people who do not understand that specific numbers are better than generalized numbers and they do not understand that a tool is a help and not the ultimate point for decision, They do not understand that a range of 10 between numbers means a very broad area for interpretation. So the typical situation will be:

• You came to a life cycle cost of X for a specific solution and you as well show the costs for an alternative X+Y.

• The use of the calculator “proves” that your numbers are wrong …. as it uses other (general) border criteria and other assumptions and come to the solution that the other solution is better than your solution. So your solution is out, most of the times you will not have the possibility to show the error.

• There will be a hint for the application “specific numbers are always better than generalized default numbers “ – but nobody will follow that out of laziness.

My solution for that would be a tool that obligates the user to put in some work and own thinking to come to a result … a tool that obligates the user to actively put in at least the sensible data by her/himself.

Not to ramble on without any reaction I do stop here and wait for comments.

Thanks

Christoph

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Re: Toolkit, guideline and excel model for a standardised approach to cost-benefit analysis

Posted by CeciliaRodrigues - 26 Oct 2012 22:09

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Thank you, Jonathan for the WASHCost hint. I always find interesting the things they publish. I am currently registered for the online course 'Costing Sustainable Services'. There are 150 people

registered and until last week there were some places left for the second edition, that starts on the 19th of November: www.washcost.info/page/2351

There was also a post from July in the IRC website that mention they are releasing soon, probably during the course, a prototype of an online tool, the WASHCost calculator. The idea is that with this tool, we'll be able to better plan, budget, manage and evaluate WASH service delivery models. www.irc.nl/page/73087

Let's see what comes from this training. I'll be glad to share with you some impressions.

Best regards,

Cecília.

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WASHCost in Ghana!!

Posted by dwumfourasare - 15 Dec 2012 21:36

Dear All,

As WASHCost is spreading its LCCA methodology for costing sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services worldwide, Ghana too is not left out with some lasting impressions so far for the past five years. Check out some briefing notes from the WASHCost Project in Ghana, attached.

you can also check here:

www.washcost.info/page/198

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Re: washcost calculator

Posted by dickinson - 19 Dec 2012 14:13

Dear Christoph,

I just received a link to this post.

Thanks for your interest in the WASHCost and the sanitation level indicators. I think you bring up some interesting areas for discussion. I am currently managing the WASHCost Calculator project and I think it is great that you are already posing questions and have ideas because we will need user feedback throughout 2013 as we develop the tool. I agree with you that the tool should not prescriptive about benchmark ranges of costs. It should provide different types of users with different functions as not everyone will be using the tool in the same way.

First, this project is building on the experience of WASHCost in Andhra Pradesh India, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Mozambique. In each country, there are slightly different norms on the indicators, especially for what constitutes a basic level of service. During collection, the broad parameters of various service levels were defined to accommodate country norms, and that each country used different sub indicators against these parameters. Also in keeping with data that was feasible to collect in that country.

Second, we are using each indicator to measure what is actually happening on the ground and basing our figures on that (therefore the ranges). That is why there is a gradation in service level, in order to understand what the reality is. I think there is scope for discussing the exact definition for each level and indicator and we should also recognise that these are not necessarily the same in every country. There are currently global discussions on better defining what should be the ideal level, especially in regards to the post-2015 development goals.

The WASHCost Calculator is being built in an environment where the discussion about the norms and exact definitions are different in different contexts and global indicators are changing. That is why the tool will be built to be able to deal with these kinds of changes. The database and the way that data is presented will be appropriate for this.

It is important to note that the tool has several functions that I think will work perfectly fine in this environment: to demonstrate the current benchmark data that we have on the cost of sanitation (not prescriptive), to allow users to search a database of sanitation service level and cost information (the evidence), to allow users to run their own analysis and estimates based on more detailed inputs (for users that want to do more), and to allow users to actually collect data in the field and do some basic analysis and to update benchmarks based on the results (for managers want to monitor the real situation). The exact functionalities will be determined during the course of 2013 based on real user feedback about what they value most.

We are not going to develop one tool for all types of users. Rather some functions, where the user will do more work, will only be for those that are really interested. In some cases, people will just want to integrate the functions or surveys into their own systems. We will try to encourage the sharing of data in any case. Also, we will never have a perfect data set, but as we start to have more data on a particular

context, e.g. a country and technology, then we should be able to narrow the current benchmark ranges.

Ultimately, I expect that this tool will be a way for sanitation professionals to start improving the data of life-cycle costs and service levels that they work with, both in planning and in monitoring.

Just a note, I'm sure some of my colleagues, better placed to answer specific sanitation content issues, will be able to respond after the holidays. Thanks for your patience on that account.

Best,

Nick Dickinson

Follow me on twitter: @waternote

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Re: washcost calculator
Posted by christoph - 19 Dec 2012 14:42

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Dear Nick,

thanks for the reply, a lot of aspects got clearer now. Sounds good what your wrote.

So we keep in touch after the holidays.

Happy Christmas and have a good time and a successful calculation in 2013. ☺

Best regards,

Christoph Platzer

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Re: washcost calculator
Posted by muench - 24 Jun 2013 12:17

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Today I read this update on the WASHCost calculator, pretty interesting. I look forward to seeing the online version in September or October (the suspense is increasing!).

Note at the end of the article you can sign up for updates and have the chance to become an early user tester.

www.washcost.info/page/2907

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IRC first revealed sketches of the WASHCost Calculator at the Monitoring Sustainable WASH Service Delivery symposium organised by IRC in April 2013. We received feedback from future users including NGOs, governments and donors at the symposium, at a WASHCost training, and during partner visits. Online user testing of the beta version of the tool will be starting in July in preparation for the final version scheduled to be released in October 2013.

The Calculator is an intuitive & dynamic life-cycle costs app for the evaluation of water, sanitation and hygiene services. Using the sketches, IRC was able to test the way people navigate through the tool and been extremely helpful to reveal the most valuable functions. Users would like to be able to track water and sanitation services over time to show how they are performing against expectations. They would also like to see how their services compare against others in terms of cost and level of service.

The tool will cater to both those who are just getting started with life-cycle costs and service levels and more advanced users who are applying the life-cycle costs approach. In both cases, the tool provides quick feedback on the cost of providing a service and on the planned or real level of service achieved. It will provide comparisons against WASHCost benchmarks, existing water and sanitation services, and the data of other organisations. The WASHCost benchmarks represent the best available data, based on both breadth and methodology, and provide easy to understand outputs that can help users refine the services they are planning and delivering.

Some ways users have said they would like to use the tool include:

Training district staff on the life-cycle costs approach

Tracking services over time

Comparing the costs in new proposals against historical data

Visualising life-cycle costs information for a country or programme

Timeline

Since the end of 2012, IRC has been working with Hattery to make the WASHCost Calculator a success. Hattery, based in San Francisco, is providing consultancy services to improve the marketing and development of the Calculator to ensure that it achieves a high standard on par with the best digital products from Silicon Valley. Since February 2013, the product development firm, Native, has been contracted to build the tool. In October 2013, the version 1.0 of the WASHCost Calculator will be publicly released.

In addition to the development team, key partners are providing support to the development of the tool by providing feedback after testing the tool and by providing additional life-cycle costs data. The WASHCost Calculator will be released publicly in two stages:

WASHCost Calculator Beta, Expected August 2013

WASHCost Calculator 1.0, Expected October 2013

December 2012 – January 2013

IRC and Hattery start the WASHCost Calculator project and begin to recruit a product development firm through a tender process.

February 2013

Product development firm, Native, is selected. IRC, Native and Hattery meet to start to work out the requirements of the tool. IRC approaches organisations with life-cycle costs data to encourage them to provide feedback during user testing and to improve the tool outputs. If you are interested in sharing life-cycle costs and service level information with the WASHCost project, please contact Nick Dickinson by emailing

This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it

.

March 2013

Development of wireframes (sketches) of the basic version of the water service tool. www.washcost.org is set up to allow people to sign up for updates. This site will be used as the product site when it goes live.

April 2013

Wireframes tested with users at the IRC symposiumMonitoring Sustainable WASH Service Deliveryin Ethiopia. New WASHCost brand developed for WASHCost products. The user data that the WASHCost Calculator will use to generate outputs is defined in detail.

May 2013

Additional user testing incorporated into an advanced WASHCost training in Nairobi. The tool internal logic and calculations are refined before the development of the database. Final WASHCost brand selected. Partners approached for life-cycle costs data. The database and tool software development begins for the beta version of the tool

June - July 2013

Database and interface are tested online. Draft terms of use and privacy agreements developed for feedback. First testing of data import and export functionalities with the global life-cycle costs database.

July 2013

User-testing completed. Changes based on user feedback are incorporated into the tool. WASHCost Calculator 1.0 development begins.

August 2013

Life-cycle data from third party data sets is incorporated into the WASHCost Calculator to improve country-level and global comparisons.

September 2013

WASHCost Calculator Beta released and shared at the Stockholm World Water Week 2013, 1 – 6 September. WASHCost 1.0 user tested.

October 2013

User feedback incorporated into the WASHCost Calculator 1.0 and it is publicly released.

Learn more

Are you interested to learn more about the WASHCost Calculator? Sign up for updates and a chance to become an early user tester at: www.washcost.org

Nick Dickinson

12 June 2013

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WASHCost Calculator exhibition at Stockholm Water Week

Posted by jonpar - 26 Aug 2013 22:17

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www.washcost.org/blog/tag/calculator/

WASHCost Calculator exhibition at Stockholm World Water Week

Monday, September 2 – Thursday, September 5

Location: Exhibition floor – Standnumber B03:6,

If you are attending Stockholm World Water Week, please plan to attend the WASHCost round table discussion to look at the existing life-cycle costing tools that help the WASH sector improve access to life-cycle costs data and analysis.

The WASHCost calculator will be on the exhibition floor where we welcome people to test the beta version of the WASHCost calculator for water and sanitation.

Feedback from the user community at Stockholm will shape functionalities of the tool as IRC continues with development of the public version.

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Re: WASHCost Calculator exhibition at Stockholm Water Week

Posted by jonpar - 26 Aug 2013 22:19

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also at Stockholm Water Week .....

Round table on life-cycle costing tools: their future and value

Thursday, September 5

Time: 13h30 – 15h30 GMT +1

Location: Room M13

From district level annual planning to large scale infrastructure projects, professionals should have access to the best available life-cycle costs in order to establish WASH services that last beyond the life-time of a typical project. Two of the latest life-cycle costing tools will be presented by Water For People (Kate Fogelberg) and IRC (Nick Dickinson) as well as a rapid review of other existing financial tools for water and sanitation. The presentations will be followed by open discussion on what users are looking for in a life-cycle costing tool.

This event is open to all. We'll be inviting a combination of those working with the life-cycle costing approach, potential large institutional and project users of these tools, and individuals and organizations who support the on-going development of these tools and/or are interested in improving access crucial WASH information, especially on expenditure and service levels.

Space is limited so email washcostcalculator [AT] irc.nl if you are interested in reserving a seat.

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Re: washcost calculator

Posted by dickinson - 29 Aug 2013 01:17

Dear Christoph and Elisabeth,

Thanks for your messages and for following our progress. The discussion on the Susana forum has been great. Please let me know if you would like early access to the tools as testers and could provide us some feedback.

For your information, we have only just started user testing of the basic tool about a week ago and based on that there will be a public version available in Stockholm. The basic tool is quite limited in scope but should be useful for initial exposure and learning about life-cycle costs and to do some very simple life-cycle costs analysis.

The advanced tool is not ready yet but I'll be presenting the functionality and what it will look like at the Stockholm World Water Week and in our blog, where you can find all our updates: www.washcost.org/blog

I hope that we can now continue this important discussion on how to make an appropriate life-cycle costs analysis tool for sanitation. I know that there will be lively debates, as always, on the right indicators but I hope that the tool we are producing now will at least enable people to start sharing some data in a comparable way.

Nick Dickinson

Follow us on twitter too!

www.twitter.com/washcostcal

www.twitter.com/waternote

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Re: washcost calculator

Posted by muench - 19 Sep 2013 09:24

Dear all,

Has anyone else tried out the WASHCost Calculator Tool yet? I gave it a quick test this morning and have a couple of brief observations.

Here is the link to the website:

washcost.org/cal

Only the basic tool is available for now. I am curious which additional functionalities the advanced tool will have.

The user interface is really nice, very graphical, very pretty!

I was a bit disappointed by the small number of toilet options to choose from, see screenshot:

(obviously, UDDTs is not amongst them; probably the reason is that the pilot countries didn't deliever sufficient costing data on the UDDTs? Mind you, later in the piece the user anyway has to enter the capital and O&M cost; thus why could the UDDT not be included?)

Later the user is being asked if the toilet has a permeably slab or an impermeable slab. This is worded in a misleading way. It should be: is it completely sealed at the bottom or not. Show me a pit latrine that is completely sealed - then it is no longer a pit latrine - are you talking of a holding tank?

I was somehow expecting that the tool would give the user the capital costs and the O&M costs, but no, these have to be added by the user (maybe the advanced tool will give the costs?).

Finally, the end result is a huge fat number (Life Cycle Cost), which does not mean anything to me... (haveing that benchmark information will be useful).

Therefore, my suggestion is how about you also provide the calculated figure for the daily cost using the equation to annualise the capital costs? I wrote about it here on the forum:

forum.susana.org/forum/categories/139-ge...12&start=12#5534

Would that be feasible? At least that figure (in $/user/day) would be more easy to grasp by the average user of the tool.

Kind regards,

Elisabeth

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Re: washcost calculator

Posted by dickinson - 22 Oct 2013 14:13

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Dear Elisabeth,

First of all, thank you very much for going through the WASHCost Calculator and taking the time to provide your feedback here. This is very valuable. Also, my apologies for the delay in getting back to you.

We've been busy preparing the advanced tool, which I think will have quite a lot of the functionality that you would like to see in the basic tool. We are a bit behind our original timeline. Based on user feedback, we are now working on a new version of the basic tool, which will have a clearer introduction and report page to clarify some common questions as well.

The main purpose of the basic tool is to act as a quick introduction to the life-cycle costs of sanitation and to encourage people to start using the advanced tool (available in December) and start thinking about the financial sustainability of services. So the options are limited to make it a quick exploration. In the future, the output pages can be shared and that will be a nice way to introduce people to the concept of life-cycle costs and measuring services. I think the advanced tool will be more interesting for you.

Regarding the toilet options, in the advanced tool, each technology option can be further refined to also include things like urine diversion. Please check our new blog, which gives an example of some of the advanced tool inputs: http://blog.washcost.org/washcost-calculator/venkatapuram-1/

Tomorrow we will post the outputs blog. Please do share your thoughts.

Regarding the impermeable slab, this has to do with the floor of the latrine, not the pit.

The calculator is a learning tool in which people are encouraged to input whatever data they have before any suggestions are made. The idea is that when people come to the output page, they will then be able to click back to the various input pages to change their answers and explore different options. We are also looking at how we can improve the guidance and help text around these questions so that users are encouraged to simply click an answer within the benchmark range if they are unsure.

Taking this approach is particularly important in the advanced tool where we hope to start being able to provide comparisons with user inputted data. Until people provide the input, we have research like WASHCost to provide some kind of indication when we all know that the technology, region and even management of services can have a big impact on costs. But I'm convinced we can improve the availability of data in the sector. For that reason, we prefer the design of a tool that learns from users and begins to become smarter over time rather than a tool that is preprogrammed with some answers.

Until all the data is there, people can still use the tool to do basic life-cycle costs analysis that may have been difficult otherwise and they can also use it to generate nice reports. I'm glad you like the visuals.

If it turns out there is more demand to see numbers in terms of $ / person / day, we can certainly accommodate that. At the same time, we have benchmarks based on mostly real expenditure data and sometimes supplemented with figures from literature where data is scarce.

As capital expenditures are incurred before the service can start, we prefer to show these as a single separate value. The recurrent expenditure then is a separate value (now $ / person / year), which also includes capital maintenance, e.g. the cost of rehabilitating or replacing facilities.

Perhaps one note: in the future, I hope that people will start to create their own output formats for the Calculator or build sanitation finance and business that can connect to the calculator.

It's important to point out that it is an open source project and that we also provide an API, which allows people with other databases, information systems and tools to interact with the data and outputs they have in the WASHCost Calculator. IRC will continue to provide the tool as a free service but we hope we to get new valuable functionalities from the community as well and see people use it in ways we did not imagine.

There are many excel based tools out there with lots of valuable data and it would be great if they could start interacting with the WASHCost Calculator as well.

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