

HWEMUDUA.

By Bill Osborne

West Africa, including Ghana uses an intricate and comprehensive set of symbols to convey a range of intentions, emotions and descriptions. These symbols described as “Adinkra” perform just the same function as those emojis and emoticons that pop up in every electronic communication these days. Adinkra is thought to date to 1817, and as such can be considered West Africa's very own emojis!¹

Amongst those symbols is Hwemudua



which means literally “measuring stick” but is widely interpreted as the symbol for Quality Control.

So what aspects of Quality are evident in the lives of impoverished people of Northern Ghana. At first, it might seem very little; after all, when your median income is GH¢9.04 per person per day² (US\$2.13), how can quality possibly be achieved.

Well how about:

Community buy in
Top management commitment
Continuous improvement
Customer satisfaction
Supplier Quality
Problem solving
Process view³

Sound familiar?

So how do those concepts fit into as simple a thing as a new toilet?

In our developed society we take for granted so many things. In talking of aspirations we often immediately start with more money, a new car, better homes. How can a toilet be aspirational?

In Ghana domestic sanitation is the number one issue in development activity. Most rural villages have very little or no sanitary facilities, and thus open defecation is a serious concern. Such a concern in fact that the newly elected Ghanaian President has consistently promised sanitation improvement as a major aspect of his policies. Can't get much more top level commitment than that.

We're all aware of Maslow's categories of Basic, Psychological, and self-fulfilment needs. The basic needs of sanitation can be fulfilled with a simple hole in the ground but the psychological needs of privacy, dignity and self-esteem are far harder to achieve. And the self fulfilment needs of full potential

¹ www.adinkra.org for more info on the full set of symbols.

² Ghana Living Standards Survey (2014) Ghana Statistical Service www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/glss6/GLSS6_Main%20Report.pdf

³ <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/basic-concepts.html>

and creative activities are beyond reach. ⁴

In Northern Ghana in the regional town of Tamale (t'malii⁵) the RUSHING project is addressing this directly. (“Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Market Development in Northern Ghana ”)

Partly funded by Global Affairs Canada, in co-operation with Winnipeg based iDE Canada <http://www.idecanada.org/>, this project engages local people as customers, local businesses in the supply and manufacturing chain, and education and training of local trades professionals, in a two fold approach to both improve immediate and domestic access to sanitation, as well as strengthen and enlarge local entrepreneurship and business and project management.⁶

The project started from a simple premise. What does a rural Ghanaian want from a domestic toilet? That seems really obvious doesn't it. Well no, not if you've never seen a proper toilet, and had no idea that such a thing is even possible for personal households.

Much of the Sanitation and toilet approaches amongst development in the past has focussed on the “top down” approach, with well intentioned organisations swooping in, proudly building a “community toilet” and swooping out again after issuing a self congratulatory press release.

Recent research shows that approach has failed on several fronts:⁷

Ownership. With this just “dropped” (pun intended) into the community no-one in the community feels engaged or responsible, with concomitant lack of maintenance or even day to day cleaning.

Accessibility. All very well having a community toilet but if your home is 5 kilometres away in the forest, it isn't really very “convenient” (another pun intended) is it?

Entitlement. A subset of the community toilet is the top down building of individual toilets in “selected homes” This breeds resentment (why should they have that) and entitlement (why should I pay for a toilet if they'll just give me one?)

Needs. Fewer than half of sanitation projects address or meet the users needs.

Planning. No plans are made for sustainability or training.

RUSHING addresses these by having local private businesses selling toilets individually as normal way of “doing business” (stop with the puns already, eh) and by extensive training and support.

This approach was decided after extensive initial research and surveys of the intended customers. I've had occasion before to comment about this sort of customer engagement survey in Africa – you can't just send out some doodle poll – surveying customers in Northern Ghana means walking several kilometres through the forest and bush to find and engage with people. This is somewhat easier in Ghana, which has a very good electoral roll and can identify most rural communities and people. But still you need to be prepared for long days in the bush. So next time you complain about non-response

4 <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

5 NOT TahMalay (no mexican snack foods)

6 <https://www.ideglobal.org/press/launching-the-sanitation-revolution-in-ghana>

7 <http://www.improveinternational.org/2012/08/01/sad-stats-failure-of-water-sanitation-projects/>

to a survey, just be thankful you're not trekking through the bush in +33° celsius heat.

IDE and Canada do not explicitly identify themselves on the finished product, in order to foster a better local relationship between the private sector suppliers and the community. Indeed part of project preparation was coming up with a name for the product. In Ghana in previous years there were environmental health officers, known as “Sama-Sama”. So the name Sama-Sama was chosen by Ghanaians themselves as indicating this is a specifically Ghanaian solution and explicitly identifying this as a health improvement product.

For the final customers there is no evidence that this is in any way a “development” project. This is an individual person demonstrating their personal aspirations, and with no stigma of seeming patronised by “white people” (*obruni* in the local twi language) .

This is also evident in the final design and color of the product. Sama-Sama experimented with different colors and patterns, and ultimately customer feedback (another trek into the bush) showed that people felt that the bright blue color was the best indicator of an aspirational achievement, since it was then obvious that this was a careful investment and not just something from the local village handyman. Sama-Sama had experimented with toilet blocks painted in traditional Ghanaian designs, which every *obruni* immediately picks as their favorite, but local people rejected it for precisely that reason – this was seen as yet another patronising example of foreign imposition in what people wanted.

The funding from Canada is directed towards the project management and project infrastructure. No money goes directly to any local business or end customer. This seems intuitively opposite if not perverse to the gut feel of a development project. Surely just give people the money to buy the toilet, and fund the businesses to build the toilet. However that model contains the seeds of its own failure – what happens when the money runs out? The business owners have a get-out clause when they're unable to deliver by pointing to the Development organisation and saying, well they didn't support me.

In iDE and RUSHING's model, responsibility for the funding of the toilet lies entirely with the end customer, and supply chain Management and Production is entirely the responsibility of the local businesses – in short, ownership is with the customer and the business. As part of that iDE and Rushing teaches the supplier how to set up a micro-financing arrangement for the customer so that the customer can achieve their desire as well as allowing the business to achieve their financial goals. When all is said and done this is a *business* approach, not a “charity” or “development” approach, except inasmuch as development arises out of this business, bottom up, model

iDE's model builds in continuous improvement in business processes of the manufacturer in terms of learning to streamline their production processes, cost reduction, and design improvement.

iDE supports the business in learning how to do this, but ultimately success or failure is on the business owners' shoulders, and their commitment to the end customers. As far as the end customer is concerned, it is the business owner's responsibility if things go wrong. Accountability is built in.

I specifically asked a business owner about scaling up and going from having no experience in this business to delivering multiple toilets a week. He admitted it was a challenge, but one he was committed to achieving. The potential personal loss of reputation was a major driving factor (Reputational Costs – don't we all know about that?) .

Some risk is taken out of the projects by targeting already existing ceramics and concrete product manufacturers as the initial providers. Even so this is identified as a risk by the project, but mitigated by the fact that this introduces no new technology, just a different application.

I spoke personally with one of SAMA-SAMA's first customers, and asked about the cost. Specifically I asked what did he have to give up to finance this toilet. He explained he wasn't worried about giving something up, because having a toilet was "a dream" for him and achieving his aspirations outweighed any immediate cost impact. Think about that next time you worry about having to cut back to have enough money for something. How much are you willing to give up to make transformation in your life. And what is it that will transform your life?

The dream of transformation is achievable for everyone. Sesa Wo Suban:



The picture shows Bill inspecting (but not using(!)) the final production model of the toilet.



Meda Se (thank you) to iDE's country director Brian Kiger for hosting of the project visit and specifically to Vishal Raj, Innovation Director and Design Ambassador, iDE Ghana⁸ for highlighting the project Quality themes.

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Opinions and ideas in this article are entirely Bill's own. Any mistakes, omissions or questions should be addressed to Bill, not iDE.