

Laura Orlando  
**Reflections of a Sanitarian**

I have been engaged in improving sanitation in the United States and internationally for thirty years. Part of that work falls under the framework of project-based international development. Using typical evaluation methods, I have failed. But that failure is erased when the development project is viewed as a process and not an event fixed in time and space. When the project is explained by relationships through meaning-making, its evaluation is about information and not judgement. The meaning-making asks what interacts with what and how. The object of the effort - the bridge, the dam, the road, the toilet - are just the nodes of interactions. The object alone, without consideration of the always present relationships, makes for reflections that do not tell what really happened and what incremental changes can be made to find the right answers to what is and what could be next. No aspect of a development project suffers from this reification more than technology. Sanitation projects are exemplary of these phenomena. The effort is reduced to things until the obfuscation of relationships is complete. Success is measured by coverage: how many people have access to improved sanitation. Multiple ways of seeing and telling are lost in the counting. But when the evaluation is storytelling it reveals patterns, tensions, and plenty of mystery. It is in these places that Albert Hirschman suggests we look (past the toilet) to bring us closer to what we want (healthier communities).