

Sanitation

Ecological sanitation in Burkina Faso

Solid gold in human excrement

(Translators note: It is tempting to insert a sub-title of “where there’s muck there’s money”, although it is the ultimate meaning of the title, it would not be a faithful translation)

Arzouma Kiéma

Environmentally-friendly fertilizers made from human urine and faeces are available in Burkina Faso. They are the result of research-action conducted by agronomists from the (CREPA) (Regional Centre for Low-cost Potable Water and Sanitation). Known as BirgKoom and Bingkoega, these natural fertilizers are revolutionizing crop production. They produce large cabbages and increase the sugar-content of carrots. Here, we focus on an ecological revolution in the land led by good men!

A lorry empties its load of raw sewage sludge in the open air! The image is striking. Yet, this is a scene witnessed every day in large agglomerations in Africa. How can we overcome this environmental pollution with its serious implications for sanitation? For an African state like Burkina Faso, this is a serious challenge. Yet, both the science and technology for environmentally-friendly sewage disposal exist.

During a mission to Sweden, Cheick Tidiane Tandia, Director General of the *Centre regional pour l'eau potable et l'assainissement à faible coût* (CREPA) stumbled across a document about ecological sanitation. He found the approach interesting. In 2001, with the help of development partners and funding from the European Union, he launched an experiment in the suburbs of Ouagadougou to collect, treat and utilize urine and faeces for crop and cereal production.

Two years after the implementation of this environmental project, the results of the experiment are reassuring for those in favour of recycling human excrement for agricultural production. On the morning of 19 September 2008, we were impressed by the crop yield grown using fertilizers produced from human intestines

What are you doing now that the farmers have agreed to use the Ecosan products?

We are trying to overhaul the system and inject new life into it. We would like the system to keep working once the project has ended. The idea is that those who are responsible for collecting of urine from the households should be able to cover their costs using the revenues they receive from the households. At the moment we are charging households the nominal sum of 300 FCFA per month to clear their septic tanks. At the same time, an association has been established and members are responsible for delivering the treated urine to the farmers. We have to ensure that the revenues they

THE ECOSAN CYCLE

ECOSAN is a system for treating human excrement that seeks to add value to urine and faeces by transforming them into fertilizers for agricultural production. The separation at source of urine and faeces makes it possible to treat them so that they can be safely reused. The CREPA has been researching, promoting and offering training in the ECOSAN system in 10 countries of West and Central Africa since 2002.

