Taking Learning Beyond the Hotel Conference Room

How Local WASH Organizations Implement New Ideas

CONSIDERATIONS FOR: FUNDERS & INVESTORS

WASH
Impact Network

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How Funders and Investors Can Invest in the Learning and Adapting Process.

THE MONDAY MORNING PROBLEM

The importance of learning and adaptation is now widely recognized by funders and investors in the international development space. More resources are being channeled toward funding programs and tools aimed at knowledge sharing, learning and skill building. However, the participants in many of these programs—local organizations—still face numerous barriers to successfully implementing new ideas after they leave the hotel conference room.

At Results for Development (R4D), we call this the "**Monday Morning Problem."** After implementers develop or encounter a new idea that they want to integrate into their program or organization, they are faced with the difficult task of going back to work on Monday morning and finding a way to implement the new idea. Through R4D's work with the WASH Impact Network, we've identified many of these challenges, ranging from tailoring the tool to meet a program's specific needs, teaching the tool to staff members, and establishing new processes within an organization. In other words, the Monday morning problem refers to the challenges that occur between learning about a new idea and implementing it successfully.

In an effort to better understand how to support programs in their journey from learning to implementation, R4D asked WASH program implementers in India and East Africa to describe the challenges they face when implementing new ideas, and to identify some of the things that allow them the flexibility they need to be successful. This brief shares some actionable lessons for funders and investors on how to better support local implementers in their learning and adaptation process.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Results for Development (R4D) surveyed and conducted focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with members of the WASH Impact Network, a group of over 120 innovative water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs in India and East Africa. Members of the WASH Impact Network are diverse—they are not-for-profit, for-profit, and hybrid organizations implementing a wide range of WASH programs addressing an array of issues including water access and quality, open defecation, menstrual hygiene management, government engagement and advocacy, and more. R4D has engaged with members of the WASH Impact Network since 2014 with our partners, Dasra and the Millennium Water Alliance.

Results for Development
r4d.org

Dasra
dasra.org

WASH Impact Network
washinnovations.r4d.org

Millennium Water Alliance
mwawater.org

THE ROLE OF FUNDERS IN LEARNING AND ADAPTING

In our conversations with WASH program implementers, we asked, **"What enables your organization to be flexible?"** In other words, what allows them to implement new ideas, and to adapt their programs or processes? In addition, we asked, **"What kinds of resources and relationships are helpful in the learning and adapting process?"**

Here are some of the **key insights** from our conversations that highlight how fundes and investors can support innovators to learn and adapt:

ALLOW FOR FLEXIBILITY IN WORKPLANS AND PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

"When money comes from the donors with restraints…you can only spend money a certain way on a certain group or for specific impact, or with a specific process of implementing. But [for example] you realize that this community does not need wells right now. But because the donors have said, this is money to build wells, you dare not build schools instead. [The recipient organization] wants to keep getting funding. They rented a building, they set up funding, they hired people. You cannot close. You keep doing what the donors are willing to pay for even if it is not relevant."

— *Pamela Otali, Consultant*

Inflexible workplans and timelines prevent implementers from course correcting and problem solving based on lessons learned during implementation. Many respondents desire a more collaborative and honest relationship with funders, where they are able to maintain trust and transparency, while also going through the "try and fail and try again" process of innovating.

COMMUNICATE GENEROUSLY AND LISTEN TO FEEDBACK

"There are funders who have specific motives. We've had a lot of problems satisfying their whims and fancies. Some donors are very insistent on testing specific products even if it's not reasonable. And that negatively impacts staff too."

—*Focus group, India*

Changing funder priorities, and the pressure to respond to "trends" in the sector can be disruptive for implementers. The need to follow the funding can cause them to lose momentum toward a specific goal.

FUND NEW OR EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES

"There's sort of a double standard because it's like everyone wants to fund innovation, but then when it comes to actually taking the risk to fund innovation or to include innovation in larger programs, it's not really as cut and dry as the donor community is maybe making it seem like it should be."

—*Name Withheld, Millennium Water Alliance*

Funders that are risk-averse hinder the ability of local implementers to experiment and problem solve. There is limited funding for experimental approaches, and implementers often feel that they cannot learn from failure without damaging their relationships with funders.

PROVIDE NON-PROJECT FUNDING TO INVEST IN SYSTEMS AND STAFF

"We want to make a more compostable sanitary napkin, but our main challenges are that we lack funds for research and development, and our current staff lacks the time to do behavior change communication in tandem with innovating the product." —*Naina Kansar, Aakar Innovations*

Implementers expressed that without these resources, they are often unable to implement ideas learning during trainings or establish the systems necessary to scale up existing programs.

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

"What we need is site visits for partners and funders so they can apply their expertise to the gaps they see in our work. Site visits are helpful for partners to understand the real need. We should develop a partnership versus just being a resource. And we need to understand what expertise you can bring."

—*Chip Morgan, African Water Bank Construction*

Implementers seek a collaborative relationship with donors, where donors are seen as partners with expertise to contribute to the project. Many respondents said they value having mechanisms for information sharing with donors, including site visits.

Financial resources and collaborative partnerships with funders and investors provide the spaces and resources to allow local organizations to more easily learn and adapt. But without supportive relationships with partners and strong learning cultures within their own organizations, local implementers may still face barriers. Here are a few of the barriers to implementing new ideas that local WASH innovators identified during our conversations:

PARTNERSHIPS
- Lack of access to mentors and experts
- Lack of adaptable tools
- Lack of support to amplify work and increase visibility that allows organizations to continue to scale.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE
- Lack of skilled, trained local staff
- Lack of time and human resources to learn and implement new ideas
- Hierarchical structures that don't allow for staff buy-in or contribution

To read more about how partnerships and organizational culture affect the ability of local implementers to learn and adapt, visit.

WASH IMPACT NETWORK

Since 2014, WASH Impact Network and R4D have implemented capacity building and applied research aimed at uncovering the ways in which innovation WASH interventions "stick" and become sustainable for WASH innovators. The WASH Impact Network, an initiative of R4D, is a diverse cohort of over 120 innovative WASH programs across India and East Africa. They include for-profit, not-for-profit, and hybrid organizations working in WASH arenas such as sanitation marketing, community-led total sanitation, hygiene promotion, menstrual hygiene management, fecal sludge management, water systems and filtration, government engagement and advocacy, and more. WASH Impact Network activities were implemented in close coordination with regional partners, Dasra in India, and the Millennium Water Alliance in East Africa.

RESULTS FOR DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (R4D) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to unlock solutions to tough development challenges that prevent people in low- and middle-income countries from realizing their full potential. Using multiple approaches in multiple sectors including, Water, Sanitation andy Hygiene (WASH), Global Education, Global Health, Governance and Market Dynamics, R4D supports the discovery and implementation of new ideas for reducing poverty and improving lives around the world.

ABOUT OUR PARTNERS

Dasra meaning 'enlightened giving' in Sanskrit, is a pioneering strategic philanthropic organization that aims to transform India where a billion thrive with dignity and equity. Since its inception in 1999, Dasra has accelerated social change by driving collaborative action through powerful partnerships among a trust-based network of stakeholders (corporates, foundations, families, non-profits, social businesses, government and media). Over the years, Dasra has deepened social impact in focused fields that include adolescents, urban sanitation and governance and has built social capital by leading a strategic philanthropy movement in the country. For more information, visit

Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) is a consortium of 16 major WASH organizations that aims to bring sustainable solutions to the WASH sector through advocacy, shared knowledge, and collaborative programming. MWA works with governments, corporations, foundations, individuals, and other non-governmental organizations to advance best practices, share knowledge, build collaborations, and advocate for greater commitment to WASH globally.