



Issue 136 February 28, 2014 | Focus on Learning from Failure

Learning from failure appears to be a growing trend and an important issue with a number of WASH organizations—Engineers Without Borders, Water For People, the Stockholm Environment Institute, among others. Several presenters at a seminar on Learning from WASH System Failures at the 2013 World Water Week explained how unsuccessful WASH initiatives can offer vital lessons, but only if implementers and organizations are open about failure. Videos of these presentations recently became available and are listed in this Weekly issue. Other studies and resources in this issue include an article on the failure of PlayPumps and a SHARE analysis on sanitation lessons learned in four African cities.

We welcome your suggestions for future issues of the Weekly. Topics for upcoming issues include World Water Day 2014, WASH and nutrition, behavior change, community-led total sanitation, household water treatment, and menstrual hygiene management.

GENERAL/OVERVIEW

Let's Make a Success of Failures. *SciDev*, Jan 2013. M Ostergaard. ([Link](#))

Failure is common but stigmatized by donors and NGOs. Openness about poor results will drive effectiveness and innovation. Being personally associated with a public failure can be a positive experience.

EVENTS

Learning from WASH System Failures: Resilient Risk Reduction - A Seminar at World Water Week 2013. ([Links to all seminar videos](#))

The Stockholm Environment Institute organized this seminar, exploring how to solve technical and management challenges. It revealed the need for stakeholder dialogues and social learning in order to build resilience. Selected videos in the series include:

Why is WASH and Sanitation in Particular a Failing Chapter in Human Development? A Rosemarin, SEI. ([Video](#))

Water and sanitation projects are characterized by relatively large infrastructure investments, but finding out what they cost and how they are working and are maintained is not easy, even for the experts. It is not until WASH systems fail that consumers begin learning about these systems.

Failing Badly and Failing Well: What Have We Learned about Vulnerability of WASH Systems from a Humanitarian Perspective? S Klawitter. ([Video](#))

A discussion of lessons learned from a UNICEF WASH project in Pakistan.

Learning from WASH System Failures in South Asia. P Kumar. ([Video](#))

One reason for sanitation system failures in South Asia is an emphasis on hardware with no community involvement.

WASH Cases from Sub-Saharan Africa. P Morgan. ([Video](#))

Peter Morgan, director of Zimbabwe nonprofit Aquamor and longtime rural water and sanitation expert, discusses his sanitation experiences and how he has learned from failures during the course of his career.

Vulnerability and the Need for Learning Organisations. E Rottier. ([Video](#))

Erik Rottier, formerly of CARE Netherlands, discusses the need for organizations to adapt to and learn from changing situations.

Can NGOs be a Vehicle for Sustainable Sanitation? Case Study from Haiti. S Kramer. ([Video](#))

A discussion of the sanitation situation in Haiti and lessons learned from past sanitation failures.

REPORTS/ARTICLES

Changing the Whole System to Provide Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services that Last. *Water Services that Last*, Feb 2014. P Moriarty. ([Blog post](#))

"Yet as access to mobile phones moves steadily towards saturation all around the world, in much of water, sanitation and hygiene we remain stuck in decades old paradigms of supposedly appropriate technology and community management that – when looked at in detail – is failing to provide services fit for a richer, better educated and more modern world with higher expectations."

City-Wide Sanitation Project Situation Analyses, 2013. SHARE. ([Link](#))

The SHARE-funded City-Wide Sanitation project is investigating the failures of conventional approaches to urban sanitation. The project is a collaboration between the International Institute for Environment and Development and Shack/Slum Dwellers International and is being conducted in four cities across sub-Saharan Africa: Chinhoyi (Zimbabwe), Kitwe (Zambia), Blantyre (Malawi), and Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania). This report provides a summary of the situational analyses that have taken place in these four cities.

How PlayPumps are an Example of Learning from Failure. *Humanosphere*, July 2013. T Murphy. ([Link](#))

The thing is that failure is a part of innovation and the important part is whether people learn from their mistakes rather than make the same ones over and over. Turns out that PlayPumps learned. The Case Foundation, the funders behind PlayPumps, ended the program and improved how it addressed the problem of water access.

Learning from Failure: Lessons for the Sanitation Sector, 2013. S Jones. ([Link](#))

The WASH sector has struggled with the same failure issues for decades. Do we need a different way to learn and adapt?

Learning from WASH Resilient Risk Reduction. Presentation at the Water and Health Conference, 2013. A Rosemarin. ([Presentation](#))

Public dialogue is necessary to stimulate learning and to accept failures as part of development. Project cycles determined by donors can lead to WASH system failures; instead they need to be community adapted.

Of Horses and Water: Is Anyone Learning from Evaluations of WASH Programs?

Johns Hopkins University Global Water Magazine, Feb 2013. S Davis. ([Link](#))

Maybe formal, expensive evaluations by outsiders are not useful. What if we engaged the customer communities (participatory or empowerment evaluation), practitioners, peers, and donors in evaluation?

Why Do Water and Sanitation Systems for the Poor Still Fail? Policy Analysis in Economically Advanced Developing Countries. *Env Sci Tech*, May 2013. M Starkl. ([Abstract/order info](#))

The results of an independent evaluation of 60 case studies of water and sanitation infrastructure projects in India, Mexico, and South Africa, most of them implemented since 2000, demonstrate an ongoing problem of failing infrastructure even in economically advanced developing countries. This paper presents a meta-analysis of those project case study results and analyzes whether the design of existing policies or other factors contribute to failures.

WASHplus Weeklies will highlight topics such as Urban WASH, Indoor Air Pollution, Innovation, Household Water Treatment and Storage, Hand Washing, Integration, and more. If you would like to feature your organization's materials in upcoming issues, please send them to Dan Campbell, WASHplus Knowledge Resources Specialist, at dacampbell@fhi360.org.



About WASHplus - WASHplus, a five-year project funded through USAID's Bureau for Global Health, supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in access, practice and health outcomes related to water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and indoor air pollution (IAP). WASHplus uses at-scale, targeted as well as integrated approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under five years of age globally. For information, visit www.washplus.org or email: contact@washplus.org.