

HOW TO REDUCE FAILURE IN THE MALAWIAN WASH SECTOR

Discussion with Malawian frontline water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) professionals resulted in the following context-specific findings and recommendations that may help to address the challenges of learning from failures in the Malawian WASH sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Create cross-organisational platforms for sharing:** Joint sector reviews, including government, NGOs, the private sector, and community representatives, would improve reflection on failures and lessons learned. Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WESNET) would be best placed to lead such activities.
- 2 Improve coordination between organisations:** WESNET was identified as the best platform where organisations could be brought together to improve coordination. Utilisation of the different chapters in the country e.g., Northern, Central and Southern, would help narrow down the NGOs to a manageable number. Awareness of the role of WESNET needs to be raised among WASH stakeholders.
- 3 Change the role of the funder:** Donors are sometimes too dictatorial and there is a need to change; talks on changing the role of the donor should be taken up by umbrella bodies at the national level, e.g. WESNET, and not individual NGOs, as they may be biased towards their future ability to source funding.

KEY FINDINGS:

Politics and bureaucracy: WASH services such as water supply in rural areas, although largely implemented by NGOs, are regularly politicised such that investments that 'look good' politically are most often prioritised.

Poor coordination and communication: Lack of coordination or consultation among NGOs leads to duplication of projects and activities, which are then implemented inconsistently dependent on organisational values. This leads to inefficient use of funds, and confuses beneficiaries and end users.

A 'project mentality': This NGO-led situation leads to WASH programmes being 'project' based, where they lack integration with existing structures and frameworks from the outset to provide sustainable and maintained services in the long-term. This also leads to community perceptions that these are short-term interventions, which means that WASH situations return to business as usual when programmes are completed.

Inadequate community engagement: There needs to be greater consultation with communities to understand what services people need, and where they should be placed. Lack of effective consultation means that interventions and support for WASH improvements are not contextualised or in line with community priorities, which leads to low participation.

Idealist planning: What works in one geographical area, or another country, may not work in Malawi. Programmes need to have appropriate, context specific interventions or strategies which provide flexibility to adapt to specific needs and circumstances. For example, community-led total sanitation (CLTS) was highlighted as an approach which often fails in Malawi, where communities previously declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) following CLTS are reverting to open defaecation.

Insufficient capacity: The state is poorly resourced to support and sustain implementation of aspirational national WASH strategies. This is compounded by there being limited training institutions for WASH field-based staff.

Want to know more?

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