

# Taking Learning Beyond the Hotel Conference Room

How Local WASH Organizations  
Implement New Ideas

CONSIDERATIONS FOR: PARTNERS



## WHO IS A PARTNER?

In our interviews with local WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene) program implementers, many of them spoke about their relationships with international NGOs, capacity building or training organizations, or impact accelerators. In this brief, we're using the term "partner" to describe the many different kinds of organizations that work closely with local organizations to provide skill-building opportunities and other resources. Notably, this group does not include funders and investors. Findings related specifically to funders and investors are included in our other research brief, which can be found at [www.washinnovations.r4d.org](http://www.washinnovations.r4d.org).

## 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](http://r4d.org)

Dasra  
[dasra.org](http://dasra.org)

WASH Impact Network  
[washinnovations.r4d.org](http://washinnovations.r4d.org)

Millennium Water Alliance  
[mwawater.org](http://mwawater.org)

# How Partners Can Aid in the Learning and Adapting Process.

## THE MONDAY MORNING PROBLEM

Capacity building, knowledge sharing, and learning is a critical aspect of strong partnerships between local implementers and the organizations that partner with or support them. Millions of dollars are invested each year in programs and resources designed to spread new ideas, share knowledge and build skills, but little is understood about what happens after participants leave the hotel conference room.

At Results for Development (R4D), we call this the "**Monday Morning Problem.**" After implementers identify 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 a program's specific needs, teaching the tool to new 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 between learning and 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 help them implement new ideas. This brief captures insights specifically about the kinds of relationships and support that partners provide that best enable local innovators to be flexible learning organizations.

# BECOME A BETTER PARTNER



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? Specific to the kinds of support provided by partners, we asked them what events, tools, and relationships are helpful in the learning and adapting process?

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

## PROVIDE RESOURCES FOR LEARNING & ADAPTATION



“ *Money is a barrier to implementing new ideas. If you create an action plan through a workshop, do the people who organize the workshop make sure you have the funds and resources to carry out the action plan?*”

—Lionel Oludhe, Umande Trust

Partners providing funding to local organizations could ensure that they are properly resourced for learning and growth. This could be done by providing budgets that include funding for the appropriate human resources, travel and equipment to support those activities.

## PROMOTE THE WORK OF LOCAL PARTNERS



“ *When something [that a local partner does] works, really document what it was and why it worked. [...] It's especially important to document it with smaller organizations. You have a responsibility to do that because if you help an organization grow but then don't share that with others and don't give them the visibility they need to grow in the future, you've let them down.*”

— Name Withheld, Millennium Water Alliance

Local implementers need resources to learn and adapt, and amplifying their work can be one way of ensuring that they have the opportunity to attain those resources. Examples mentioned by respondents include promotion of their work through partner reports and web platforms like social media. In addition, introductions to potential funders and opportunities to attend larger conferences also help organizations grow and learn.

## ENGAGE COLLABORATIVELY WITH LOCAL PARTNERS



“ *You bring that outsider's perspective and because it is an outsider's perspective, it comes with 'this is how I've seen someone else do this,' and 'this is how you should do this because I thought that was a neat way to do it,' and that is not helpful. Instead, you can come and say, 'we have seen other people solving their problem like this, how can we help you solve your problem?'*”

—Pamela Oтали, Consultant

Collaborative relationships with partners are preferred by many local organizations who desire relationships that are not prescriptive, but characterized by joint problem-solving and experience sharing. Long-term relationships are also valued by many respondents.

## DESIGN LEARNING EVENTS WITH THE NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS IN MIND



“ *To be able to talk twice as long to one-tenth the number of people, gives you a chance to actually have meaningful exchange.*”

—James Harrington, Ugandan Water Project

Partners supporting local innovators by providing skill-building and knowledge sharing opportunities should note that many respondents prefer smaller in-person events such as site visits. Larger events like conferences are valuable primarily for the opportunity to form relationships. Webinars are generally not useful because of language barriers, time differences, and agendas that are presentation-heavy and lack time for discussion.

## CREATE ADAPTABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TOOLS



“ *There is never a follow up process. [...] So when you leave, you have actually left so much. You have gotten so much knowledge which you are not able to go and use because you have not decided how you are going to implement.*”

—Lionel Oludhe, Umande Trust

According to many respondents, tools that can be adapted to their specific needs and contexts are most helpful. These tools are ones that are accessible in soft format, like a word document instead of a PDF. With regard to skill-building workshops, respondents said that developing action plans for implementing the new idea, skill or tool helps participants succeed in putting their learning into action.

## PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR STAFF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



“ It might be cheaper to bring one expert to talk to a group of 100 farmers, but I don't think that is as practical as taking two of those 100 farmers to go and experience something... So then they can come back and share with the other 100 farmers. Instead of bringing the one foreign expert who will leave this community, take one from this community, make them an expert, and then bring them back into this community.”  
—Pamela Otali, Consultant

Another important role for partners is contributing to staff development at local organizations. Training or mentorship opportunities can help build the skills of existing staff, while providing financial resources can help local implementers build the kind of robust team that is needed for implementing new ideas.

## MORE INSIGHTS FROM LOCAL WASH INNOVATORS

Through strong partnerships that support local implementers in building robust teams and systems, local organizations will be in a better position to learn and adapt. But there are other factors at play that affect their adaptability, including relationships with funders and their own organizational cultures. Here are a few of the barriers to implementing new ideas that local innovators identified:

### DONOR RELATIONSHIPS

- Short project timelines
- Changing donor priorities
- Lack of funding for experimentation, learning, and growth

### 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

Read more about the roles of funders and organizational culture in local implementer learning and adaptation by visiting [www.washinnovations.r4d.org](http://www.washinnovations.r4d.org).



MILLENNIUM WATER  
ALLIANCE

## 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 and 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 [www.dasra.org](http://www.dasra.org)

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.



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