

Effective learning: East and Southern Africa region

Joyce Masile (Plan Tanzania), Stephen Oupal (WaterAid East Africa), Finlan Tekle Teferi (WSSCC Eritrea)

The hunter-gathering approach

Hunter-gathering is a process of rapidly collecting and collating information, experiences and contributions. In a workshop setting, hunter-gatherers self-select a topic they are most interested in championing and work together in groups to produce a short report (2-6 pages) by the end of the workshop – groups and topics will be decided upon on the first day. Each day, dedicated time is given for people to collect relevant information from one another. Over the course of the session the groups self-organise collecting contributions and feeding into other topics. Participants are asked to collect information informally through breaks and mealtimes. They may also like to use the opportunity in plenary sessions to take notes on their particular topic and ask questions to presenters that could help them with their reports. Outputs are action-orientated, with groups asked to reflect on what should be done moving forward and recommendations for policy and practice.

The notes produced are not meant to be polished or exhaustive, and they are not peer reviewed. They are rapid explorations into priority topics, which are written and disseminated quickly in the hope that they will trigger further conversations, debate and interest. As such, they are not for citation.

This methodology is very much a work-in-progress. Comments and suggestions to strengthen and develop the hunter-gatherer process and method, as well as the content and structure of the notes would be very welcome. Or if you wish to do a rapid exploration into a topic that interests you, please contact us: clts@ids.ac.uk

1. Description of issues/challenges

Key challenges impacting effective sanitation learning have been identified as described below:

Systematic documentation: NGOs and governments' sharing of experiences and learning from different approaches exists but it is narrow. For example, in Tanzania different innovations in sanitation preference are found through CLTS in the communities but most of the solutions come from abroad and are too expensive for the communities to afford. In other countries the documentation has been done but sharing and dissemination of such information remains limited.

Weak monitoring systems: Most of the NGOs and governments' monitoring frameworks are weak in terms of the results frameworks (indicators), budgets, and expertise in documenting



learning. In some cases, monitoring systems are donor oriented and do not contribute to collecting national data. This limits the extent to which monitoring and evaluation can be used to make decisions on what approaches and technologies need to be changed or adopted.

No attention given to the learning process: This is common among governments where no deliberate initiatives for learning have been developed. Although reviews are conducted, discussions are often on reviewing performance rather than on assessing and learning from the process. In cases where this is done, it is an activity at the national level which only targets key stakeholders.

Learning within organisations/ governments: There is limited sharing of best practices in organisations and governments. This is because of the silo and project based work models where individuals follow a particular scope of work. This is even weaker when it comes to sharing learning across a wider sector. Participation in existing forums and groups is a routine process with limited impact on the sector.

2. Current solutions (including country/ organisation)

A wide range of organisations such as Plan International, SNV and UNICEF have made attempts to document learning. Among their initiatives it is possible to highlight:

- Sharing information from the National Sanitation Campaign using different platforms including social media. Print media is also used to highlight achievements and learning from the implementation process.
- Working closely among the line of Ministries of Water, Health and Education to facilitate the achievement of success. Using the national dialogues as forums for sharing learning proved very effective, especially in Tanzania. During these dialogues, Ministries interact with partners and agree on next steps in sanitation promotion.
- Fostering the creation of technical sanitation working groups where both partners and government come together and share lessons learnt from the implementation process. These monthly meetings are also an entry point to influence on certain approaches and technologies that can be used and scaled up.
- At district level, learning is done through advocacy meetings on a quarterly basis. During these meetings political leaders and technocrats share successes and failures as well as actions regarding how to improve the least performing administrative structures at the lower government levels.
- At community level, the use of local structures has proved effective especially if regular meeting are held. For example, in Lotto village, district of Babati, Tanzania, the sub-village community monitors the sanitation progress.

3. Emerging questions

- How can organisations and governments move beyond sharing to ensure adequate documentation of the different processes and practices?
- Budget for learning initiatives is limited for both organisations and governments. Why is this the case?
- Why is learning amongst partners and government weak?

4. Recommendations

- Invest in evidence based documentation which can be used to show national impact. Both government and partners should improve the documentation of successes and lessons learnt. This can help to have a basis for learning and scaling up.
- Have a deliberate attempt to allocate budgets for learning initiatives. Both organisations and governments should allocate resources to facilitate different learning initiatives.
- Make writing more informal in order to encourage learning.
- Use current technologies and social media to disseminate learning.