

HOW TO REDUCE FAILURE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WASH SECTOR

Discussion with South African 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 South Africa's WASH sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Create cross-organisational platforms for sharing:** Joint sector reviews, including government, NGOs, private sector, and community representatives would improve reflection on failures and lessons learned.
- 2 Improve coordination between organisations:** In Cape Town, Day Zero was a catalyst to set up an inter-sectoral forum to inform decision-making in response to the drought. This has continued as a forum to discuss issues around water quality and WASH services. Similar inter-sectoral forums could be created in other municipalities, or even at a national level.
- 3 Change the role of the funder:** As government is the main funder of WASH services as well as the main service provider, other organisations need to hold the government to account for service provision. Social auditing can allow users a voice to identify failures between what has been promised by government and what has been delivered.

KEY FINDINGS:

Politics and bureaucracy: The state is the primary stakeholder in WASH service provision, so politics has an outsized influence. The tender process for municipal contracts is bureaucratic, slow, and open to corruption and politicisation.

Poor coordination and communication: The issues of coordination and accountability around municipal services are systemic. Failures in WASH link to wider service provision issues, inter-governmental coordination, municipal finance management, incentives and disincentives in the public sector, corruption, and managing the increasing size of municipalities.

A project mentality: Declines in the reliability of basic services are often due to a lack of maintenance. WASH projects must be integrated into well-established operation and maintenance frameworks to prevent increased service delivery backlogs in the future.

Inadequate community engagement: There needs to be greater consultation with communities to understand what services people need, and where they should be placed. People find themselves without ways to engage the state on failures in WASH services.

Idealist planning: Communities cannot be viewed as uniform. Projects need to build in flexibility to address challenges arising from local contexts and vulnerabilities in each location, even if an intervention has previously been successful elsewhere.

Insufficient capacity: A municipality such as eThekweni services over 500 informal settlements as well as formal areas. The scope of this challenge is huge and frontline professionals often feel unable to address daily challenges in this work.

Want to know more?

This country-specific brief was produced as part of the research project 'Amplifying Local Voices to Reduce Failure in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector', funded by the Royal Academy of Engineering as part of the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund. You can read about the project methodology and overall findings in the main research brief, available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.23785.01127>

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