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SLH Learning Paper

Learning in the Sanitation and Hygiene Sector

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institute of development studies

the sanitation learning hub

About the SLH:

For over ten years, IDS's Sanitation Learning Hub (SLH, previously the CLTS Knowledge Hub) has been supporting learning and sharing across the international sanitation and hygiene (S&H) sector. The SLH uses innovative participatory approaches to engage with both practitioners, policy-makers and the communities they wish to serve.

We believe that achieving safely managed sanitation and hygiene for all by 2030 requires timely, relevant and actionable learning. The speed of implementation and change needed means that rapidly learning about what is needed, what works and what does not, filling gaps in knowledge, and finding answers that provide practical ideas for policy and practice can have exceptionally widespread impact.

Our mission is to enable the S&H sector to innovate, adapt and collaborate in a rapidly evolving landscape, feeding learning into policies and practice. Our vision is that everyone is able to realise their right to safely managed sanitation and hygiene, making sure no one is left behind in the drive to end open defecation for good.

About the series:

SLH Learning Papers explore and aim to answer questions on emerging issues, approaches and gaps and blind spots in the sanitation and hygiene sector. The topics of these in-depth, peer reviewed papers and scoping studies are generated in discussion with stakeholders and either conducted by the SLH or partners, or developed collectively in workshops and writeshops. The aim is to generate understanding and awareness as well as providing practical guidance for both policy-makers and practitioners.

All issues are available here: https://sanitationlearninghub.org/series/slh-learning-papers/

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Dr Sarah House is an Independent WASH Consultant / Public Health Engineer, committed to building WASH sector capacities on how to learn more effectively from communities, including from people who may be most disadvantaged, and turning that learning into action at scale.

Front cover image:

Formative research being conducted on the experience of people with disabilities in WASH. A deaf woman who cannot speak from Sarlahi shares her experiences on water use and personal hygiene, SNV Nepal.

Photo taken by: Vijay Yadav, District DPO, Sarlahi, on behalf of SNV Nepal

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Acronyms

CBSA	Community-based Sanitation Alliance
CLTS	Community-led Total Sanitation
CoP	Community of practice
DPO	Disabled person's organisation
EQND	Equality and non-discrimination
HIF	Humanitarian Innovation Fund
KII	Key informant interview
KM	Knowledge management
LGA	Local Government Authority
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MHM	Menstrual hygiene management
MOOC	Massive open online courses
OD	Open defecation
ODF	Open defecation free
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
PSEA	Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
RAL	Rapid Action Learning
RIU	Research into use
S&H	Sanitation and hygiene
SanCoP	Sanitation Community of Practice, UK
ToT	Trainer of trainers
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WSSCC	Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council

Executive summary

This *SLH Learning Paper* summarises the key learning from a rapid topic exploration on 'Learning in the Sanitation and Hygiene Sector'. Through a literative review and interviews with 32 professionals working across the WASH and associated sectors, this desk study looked at how people in the WASH sector learn, the processes utilised and what seems to work best; as well as the barriers and challenges to learning. It looked at learning from communities and peer-to-peer and how the learning gets translated into action at scale.

It is clear that there are multiple ways that people working in the WASH sector already learn. Hands-on learning-by-doing, learning by making mistakes, face-to-face training with action planning and follow-up and exchange visits and immersions, being highlighted as being of particular use.

Participants observed the changes in preferences for learning models over time and observed that today that to '***keep people engaged – it is like tap-dancing***'. It was acknowledged that different kinds of learning approaches are still needed for different purposes and for different learner groups, and it was suggested that we also need to consider more '***what is effective versus what is popular?***', as they may not be the same.

A wide range of barriers were identified to effective learning in the WASH sector, which itself poses the question – how do we ever learn? These include barriers from the diverse backgrounds of sector personnel and the high turnover of staff, and the existence of errors, myths, biases and blind spots in the way we operate and learn. Information overload and the limited time and resources committed to learning also pose significant barriers.

Going forward, more opportunities to learn and share good practices are needed particularly for local government and field level staff, who currently have less opportunities; and more effort is needed on learning from communities, including from people who may be most disadvantaged and less visible. More attention is needed on determining the most appropriate methodologies for this level of learning and newer innovative approaches have been highlighted, like PhotoVoice and child-led evaluations.

To be able to turn learning into action at scale, there is also a need to build capacities and confidence on learning, documentation and sharing and in strengthening WASH sector network organisations to be able to facilitate learning and sharing more effectively. It is also very important to ensure that government is engaged from the early stages of learning processes, including staff from senior to sub-district levels.

It is hoped that while you are reading this paper that you will also be asking yourself the questions: 'how do we learn best?'; 'what barriers are there that make it more difficult for us to learn?'; 'what steps do we need to improve how to learn more effectively?'; and 'how can we speed up the process of learning and turning that into action at scale' for the ultimate benefit of the communities we work with and support.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This *SLH Learning Paper* summarises the key findings of a rapid topic exploration on how the sanitation and hygiene (S&H) sector learns horizontally as well as from communities. This is to understand the processes used, how the learning is being integrated into our work and to consider the ways of moving forward with the aim to strengthening learning processes within the sector. A *SLH Learning Brief* accompanies this paper.

1.2 Scope of the review/methods

The study involved a desk study of published and grey literature including analysis of existing reviews and conceptual frameworks on learning and knowledge management.[1] It involved 32 remote interviews with people in organisations and institutions working in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. This included people representing learning and training institutions, universities, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, government, donors and funding bodies, networking organisations, communities of practice and freelancers/the private sector.

Box 1: Key takeaways

1. There are multiple ways that people working in the WASH sector prefer to learn – with hands-on learning-by-doing, learning by making mistakes, face-to-face training with action planning and follow-up and exchange visits and immersions, being of particular use.

2. There are multiple barriers to learning in the WASH sector – including the diverse backgrounds of sector personnel, turnover of staff, the existence of errors, myths, biases and blind spots in the way we operate and learn, information overload and limited time, and resources committed to learning.

3. More sharing and learning opportunities are needed related to good practices for sanitation and hygiene for local government and field level staff and more attention focussed on learning from communities, including from people who may be most disadvantaged, as well as paying more attention to the most appropriate methodologies for this level of learning.

4. There is a need to build capacities and confidence on learning, documentation and sharing and in strengthening WASH sector network organisations to be able to facilitate learning and sharing more effectively.

5. For learning in the WASH sector and turning this learning in action at scale, it is important to ensure that government is engaged from the early stages, including from different levels – including senior levels to sub-district levels.

[1] The list of references in this document refers only to those specifically mentioned in this document. Many others were also viewed as part of the analysis.

2. Findings: How we learn best

2.1 Levels of learning in the WASH sector

The WASH sector is very diverse, with a wide range of professionals with different backgrounds and learning needs. There are also different levels where learning needs to occur. These vary in terms of depth and level of detail, related to the stage and purpose of the learning needed, and also vary in relation to:

1. Scale – learning by individuals, organisations, and sector-wide;
2. By field and office-based workers; and
3. Sectoral as well as cross-sectoral.

2.2 How we learn best

Figure 1 highlights the ways that people generally learn best.

Figure 1: How people learn best. *Source*: Authors' own

The KIIs and a number of existing studies documented a range of observations on how people learn best, which are highlighted above and below. The particular studies which offered observations on this area, included those by: Bill & Melinda GATES Foundation (Cranston 2014); Cambodia Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Programme (CRSHIP)/Plan/WaterAid/WSSCC (CRSHIP 2016; WSSCC 2016); DewPoint/Department for International Development (DFID) (Hutton 2011); IDS (Akpa and Allade 2018); Institute of Sustainable Futures, University of Sydney/Civil Society WASH Fund/ Australian Aid (Grant et al. 2016a; Grant et al. 2016b); UNICEF (KII); USAID (Coombes and Hickling 2017a; Coombes and Hickling 2017b); WaterAid (Cranston and Chandak 2016; WaterAid 2018); and Water and Sanitation Urban Programme (WSUP) (KII).

2.2.1 Learning by doing, keeping attention and mixing approaches

The general consensus from the respondents of the rapid topic exploration was that as a sector there is a need to consider a range of approaches; that learning needs to be of different depths and

detail, at different stages of learning; and to respond to the characteristics of different learners – their backgrounds and preferred learning styles. One key informant noted that in their organisation '***older professionals and women were less likely to use on-line networks***' and some people can find them overwhelming. Short briefing notes and videos are also useful for raising general awareness, but more detailed guidance documents are still needed once you start to implement.

Several key informants also noted that people's attention spans reduced and that when teaching and training there is a need to mix approaches and '***keep people engaged – it's like tap-dancing***' (KII). There is also evidence that the use of computers in learning activities including in workshops, is distracting, not only to those using the computer, but also those around them (Lantagne no date; Meyer 2014).

Participatory methodologies are also appreciated and popular and keep people engaged, with exercises where people do things for themselves, or are put in the position where they are learning from experience, being particularly valuable. See Section 4.1.6 for specific examples. But respondents also highlighted that participatory methodologies, where there is open discussion and where the facilitators do not support and intervene in discussions, can also pose risks that we can be '***sharing ignorance***'. Hence, they recommended that there is also a need for some level of moderation by facilitators with adequate knowledge and skills.

2.2.2 What is effective versus what is popular

It was also considered important to reflect on '***what is effective and what is popular?***' (KII). For example, webinars and WhatsApp networks may be popular, but it is not clear how effective they are in resulting in improved action; whereas more direct and in-depth technical training, such as training on how to calculate pipe sizes, or how to design toilets to respond to complex ground conditions, may be less popular, but essential to ensure quality of programmes. It is clear that a mix of approaches are needed, and care is needed to not only prioritise one kind or level of learning and associated capacity building.

2.2.3 Using common sense, knowing when learning is good enough and technical competence

One person noted that '***our work needs a lot of common sense – we need to teach this,***' as they felt that using common sense is a skill that not all sector actors have automatically. This issue was highlighted with the example of trainees from the sector not being able to understand that the level of recharge of an aquifer would not be more than the amount of water that fell in annual rainfall, but the comment was also felt to be relevant across a range of issues.

Comments were also made, that people are not always sure '***when they have learnt enough***' and if their learning is '***good enough?***' This includes that they do not always know when they need more support, such as from academics or from professional companies (such as from a successful sewerage company). One key informant shared a statement from a colleague: '***People need to know more to ask the right questions. They need to know when a 70-80% answer is good enough. But they don't know when good enough is not good enough***' (KII).

Several people noted their observation that the level of technical competence in the sector has reduced, which has a range of impacts on the quality of responses (see Section 4.1.7 for more discussion).

2.2.4 Ongoing 'nudges'

The importance of establishing systems where regular 'nudges' occur, to prompt behaviour change in the sector, requires the integration of learning processes into systems. For this to happen, it needs the support of leadership and their ongoing encouragement.

> ‘While changes in structures, processes and resources can create the conditions in which knowledge management flourishes; behaviour change is more likely to arise from small ‘nudges’. These small nudges could be questions to staff or modelling by leaders, or critical reflection by colleagues on a team’s work, or triggers set in software systems’ (Cranston and Chandak 2016: 5).

3. Findings: Learning from communities

People in communities are experts on their own situations, but we often do not do enough real listening and learning from community members, particularly from diverse community members, tending to focus more on the community leaders or those who are more vocal. We need to increase efforts to learn from people who may be most disadvantaged and more hidden, using methods that build the capacity and confidence of people who may be most disadvantaged to be willing and able to speak, and making sure that we ‘do no harm’ when we engage with people at community level (House 2018; House et al. 2017). We also need to be better at being less extractive and giving updates and feedback to communities, whilst ensuring that this is also done in a safe and respectful way.

3.1 Methodologies, approaches, tools and exercises

3.1.1 Methodologies and approaches used for learning from communities

There are numerous methods and approaches being used to learn from communities:

1. **Commonly used methods for learning from communities**: focus group discussions; in-depth interviews; household surveys; transect walks and observations; urban consumer surveys/user satisfaction surveys; and GPS-based survey mapping.

2. **Methods that are sometimes used, but not as much as they could be**: these include a number of participatory activities, such as community mapping; ranking; barrier analysis; gender and social inclusion analysis, etc.

3. **Methods that are used less commonly, but with potential to be used more**: immersive research; child-led (or other-group-led) evaluations; community taught trainings; user-centred design; storytelling methods such as PhotoVoice.

The methods in 1) and 2) can provide useful information for feeding back into programmes, but also have potential limitations, including related to the level of control that communities have over the direction of the learning. To some extent it can be generalised that: some of the methodologies in group 1) tend to be more directly extractive by the person(s) undertaking the learning process; whereas in 2) tend to engage the community more in the analysis; and some in 3) are more empowering as approaches, providing increased opportunity for community members to build their capacities. But this does not apply for all approaches.

A few examples of the less commonly used participatory methods from 3) with potential for wider use are shared in Table 1:

Table 1: Less commonly used methods and approaches for learning with and from communities

METHOD/TOOL	DESCRIPTION
Immersive research (Praxis, CLTS Knowledge Hub/IDS and WaterAid 2017)	A methodology based on the 'reality check approach,' where the researchers or practitioners spend some time living in a community and interacting with people, usually between 3-7 days. Useful for discovering the realities of communities and their sanitation and hygiene practices, including learning from people who may be most disadvantaged. It is an opportunity to 'ground-truth' (triangulate from the realities on the ground) the common beliefs of what is happening in the sector (Chambers 2017). This is a useful approach for improving the quality of learning from communities, and potentially has significant value, but in itself is mostly an extractive approach. However, there should be ways to feedback into communities for their own learning and use, that make it less extractive. It is very important for all researchers to be aware of risks of harm to community members during any learning undertaken at community level, including the risks through abuse by researchers themselves, such as through sexual exploitation and abuse, and the importance of preventing this. In the case of this approach, the researchers stay in the communities and sleep in the homes of community members, and hence particular care is needed in considering the risks and awareness-raising on the same.
Child-led (or other-group-led) evaluations (Hughston 2015a)	This method puts the lead for the learning into the hands of a particular group within the community. The approaches need to be developed with the evaluator group in mind. It can lead to interesting findings that may not have been considered. This is also an example of putting 'nothing about us without us' into practice. This method can also be useful for involving people with disabilities or other groups of people who may be particularly disadvantaged.
Community-taught-trainings	This method was supported by World Vision and involves community members of different backgrounds being supported to document their experiences of sanitation through different modes (document, video, role-play, etc). They then become the teachers for staff and partners, who spend between 1 to 3 days in the community, meeting each community teacher and learning from them. There is then a group reflection on what has been learnt.
Community score-card (Mwanza and Ghambi 2011)	Community score-cards are social accountability tools that can be used by communities themselves for monitoring local facilities, institutions or services, including for example, government administrative units such as district assemblies.
User-centred design (Blenkin and Ereira 2017)	This is being increasingly promoted for use in humanitarian contexts. It involves the key users in the design and feedback of prototypes for influencing subsequent designs. User-centred design was an approach used by OXFAM for the 'Social Architecture Project' (Farrington 2018), which aimed to support women to input into the design of WASH facilities in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh.

Storytelling: PhotoVoice (Ansari 2017; Bhakta 2020)	PhotoVoice is a method in which community members are trained to use a camera and asked to take photos to tell their story around a particular issue. It is their choice as to which issues they decide to prioritise, which can lead to interesting findings. It can be powerful/empowering for individuals and groups to develop and narrate their own stories, either with words, images or photos. However, it needs a lot of attention on the ethics of the process, and in particular around consent over use of photographs, including when the person involved takes photos of a third party. See the examples below and the *SLH Learning Brief* on PhotoVoice (Bhakta 2020) for more information on how PhotoVoice has been used in the sector: https://sanitationlearninghub.org/resource/uncovering-wash-realities-through-photovoice/
Storytelling: Participatory video	Videos are used for community members to tell stories and share their experiences and opinions. Community members can be supported to make their own short film. They take control of the subject matter and editing, and they may choose to roleplay scenarios. Care is also needed around the issue of consent for how the resulting video is used and to ensure that all people within the video have consented.

The following examples highlight the use of PhotoVoice and child-led evaluations:

- **Learning the realities of living with incontinence through PhotoVoice:** This technique was used very powerfully in a study on people with disabilities and incontinence in Pakistan (Ansari 2017). Through photos the people living with incontinence, shared their loneliness as friends no longer wanted to spend time with them because of the smell of urine and faeces; they shared the struggles of their carers who suffered with back pain from lifting them; they shared the need for much more soap and water; and the problems they have with insects crawling over them.

- **Turning a lizard to a cow:** Plan International supported a series of three child-led evaluations of their Building Skills for Life programmes in Cambodia, Zimbabwe and Kenya (Hughston 2015a, b and c). Plan supported children to be the evaluators, to evaluate the Building Skills for Life programme in their communities. The aim was to empower the children to obtain the feedback from their communities and make recommendations for going forward, whilst at the same time giving an opportunity for the children to gain skills and confidence. A range of appropriate participatory tools were developed for use during the evaluation such as: ranking of barriers; who carries the biggest burden exercise; confidence snails; daisy exercise for ranking importance of issues; and body mapping.

Efforts are also being made to help practitioners to learn from communities in a more systematic way as part of ongoing sanitation and hygiene programmes, and to use this learning for improvements. Two examples can be seen in Box 2. Both approaches have simplified down the tools and materials with the aim to make the learning from them more accessible for larger numbers of practitioners.

Box 2: Tools to learn from communities systematically

WASH'Em Tools (https://washem.info/): The 'WASH'Em' tools were developed in an effort to improve the consultation processes with communities and strengthen the design of hygiene promotion interventions in emergencies. The tools involve a series of images, checklists and notes. The team developing the tools also found that showing the tools in action and the recommendations through videos, were quick ways to help people engage. But as not everyone had good internet, simple two-page briefs were also needed. In terms of training materials, they found that a deck

of PowerPoint (PPT) slides was the most useful tool with associated notes, although session plans were also made available.

Sani Tweaks (https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/toolkits-and-guidelines/sani-tweaks): OXFAM, with the support of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund/ELHRA, has developed an approach called 'Sani Tweaks.' This aims to encourage sanitation actors working in humanitarian contexts to consider sanitation services as services which require on-going reflection, modification and improvement, rather than being a one-off provision. Central to the approach is strengthening the understanding, commitment to and practice of consultation, particularly of women and girls and other people who may be overlooked, such as older people and people with disabilities, when designing, obtaining feedback and improving facilities. The materials which have so far been developed include an introductory PPT and a short checklist and videos, which it is hoped will encourage more attention and take-up by field workers, than more comprehensive guidance.

3.1.2 Participatory tools and exercises for use with communities

There are a number of very useful and extensive publications, covering a wide range of participatory activities which can be used with communities. However, it was observed by a respondent and by the author of this study, that the WASH sector today seems to make less use of them than previously in other decades. A few examples are in Table 2:

Table 2: Resources with participatory exercises for use with communities

NAME	DESCRIPTION
Listen and Learn: Participatory assessment with children and adolescents (UNHCR 2012)	Provides guidance on how to safely undertake participatory assessments with children. Includes a number of tools.
Participatory Learning & Action (PLA) Tools (Pretty et al. 1995 - 276 pages, IIED)	A trainer's guide to the use of a wide range of PLA tools.
Tools Together Now (International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2006 - 249 pages)	One hundred participatory tools for mobilising communities for HIV/AIDS. Many useful and transferrable participatory tools that could be used for learning.
Social inclusion tools for WASH (Jones 2013 - WaterAid and WEDC)	A number of tools for learning with and from communities about social inclusion.

Collecting and using data on disability to inform inclusive development **(Bush et al. 2015 - Plan Australia, CBM Australia-Nossal Institute)**	A comprehensive guide with guidance on how to safely and respectfully collect information and data on people with disabilities. Includes some participatory exercises in Section 4.3.
Violence, Gender and WASH: Practitioner's Toolkit **(House et al. 2014 - SHARE co-published by 27 organisations)**	Includes Toolset 4 with a number of participatory exercises to learn about safety related to WASH.

3.2 Ensuring diversity in learning at community level - 'Nothing about us without us!'

People who may be most vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged can be excluded, whether unintentionally or intentionally from programme processes and are less likely to be the people who come forward to speak to strangers coming to their village, or to speak in community meetings. Reasons for this may be varied, but may include: their lack of self-confidence; that they are busy with other tasks to be able to feed and support their families, particularly if they are very poor; or they may be marginalised or excluded due to their status, such as due to their ethnicity, or other factors.

For people from some marginalised groups, they may need additional support to be able to work in programmes, as their exclusion in society may also go back to their educational opportunities. For example, pastoralist women may have had very little opportunity to go to school and get an education; and likewise, for people with disabilities. Women with disabilities are likely to have been even more marginalised than men with disabilities, so the different overlapping factors and levels of disadvantage should be understood when looking at inclusion. There may be a need to make proactive efforts to involve female community members with disabilities, to build their confidence, to help enable them to take part in learning activities. There is also a need to provide training for sector professionals to be aware of the need for this and how to do it.

4 Findings: Learning peer-to-peer

4.1 Overview of methods and tools used for learning peer-to-peer

A wide range of methods are used for learning peer-to-peer within the sector. These methods have been highlighted in Figure 2.

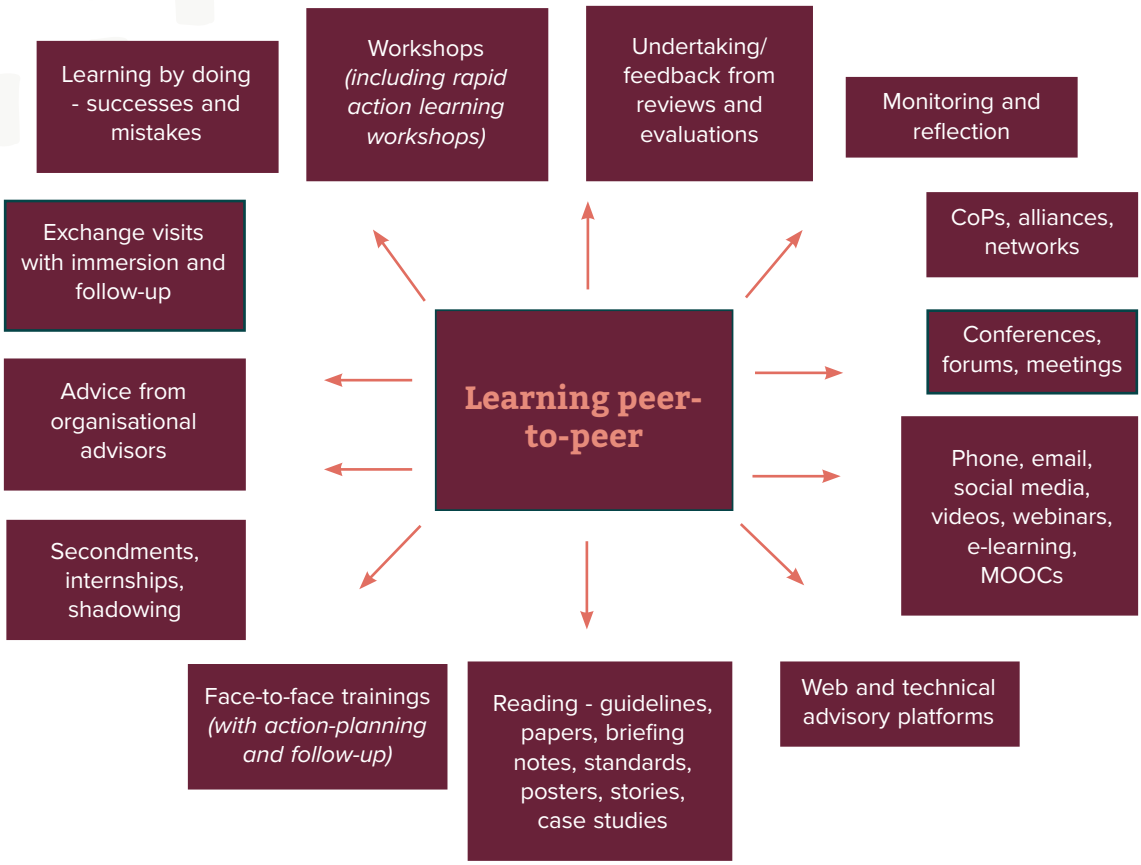

Figure 2: Methods and tools currently used for learning peer-to-peer. *Source:* Authors' own

The sections which follow provide examples of peer-to-peer learning approaches used by the sector.

4.1.1 Leadership, incentives for learning, building learning into roles and 'Learning Labs'

The importance of leadership and senior management support taking learning seriously and supporting learning to be an integrated part of programme processes, were identified as critical for effective learning (KIIs; Grant et al. 2016; Cranston and Chandak 2016):

1. There is a significant need to build the capacity of the leadership in the sector and for this to prioritise learning and to establish a learning culture – where learning is both expected and encouraged, both internal to organisations and between, including within and across sectors.

2. There is a need for knowledge management 'champions,' who can help to capture peer learning and promote sharing across the organisation.

3. To be able to adapt programmes as you progress, there is a need to build learning into programme processes – with time for project reviews and to pause and reflect – the most

effective time to do this being at the project proposal stage.

Including learning activities in staff job descriptions, annual performance reviews and performance improvement plans can increase attention on learning. World Vision developed an approach which they called **'Learning Labs**,' to institutionalise the learning process. Each person who was involved in a learning event, or undertook a learning process, was required to write what they have learnt, what they will do, and what resources they need as well as their support. Their supervisors followed up after three months to review their progress.

4.1.2 Coaching, mentoring and dedicated staff supporting learning

Ongoing coaching and mentoring were mentioned in KIIs as being of value for building capacity and confidence and influencing the learning to be turned into action. UNICEF has a **mentoring scheme for female WASH staff** to try and respond to the gap in female staff who remain with the organisation and work at senior levels. It offers shadowing of senior staff to participate in conferences and other events.

Having dedicated staff who have a role in supporting learning, either within country or regional teams, is also valued and noted to be particularly useful. Examples include: a) Technical advisors often have this particular remit and have the role to link people who need to know, with those who are likely to know; and b) Programme learning units, which have also been established in some organisations and programmes:

- **Regional Sanitation Centre, Sri Lanka** (https://www.rscsacosan.org/): A Regional Centre for Sanitation has been established in Sri Lanka, which was developed as a result of discussions at the SACOSAN in Kathmandu in 2013. It aims to foster regional collaboration, develop a permanent resource centre for knowledge management, promotion of research and best practices and for capacity building and networking.

- **Dedicated learning and documentation team**: The Cambodian Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Programme (CRSHIP) programme, which is managed by Plan International and funded through the Global Sanitation Fund, has had a dedicated Learning and Documentation Team, which has been led by WaterAid. Their job has been to support the ongoing learning and development of staff, including the learning processes and events, the research, the documentation and the dissemination (CRSHIP 2016; WSSCC 2016).

4.1.3 Sharing knowledge through documentation, media and minimum standards

Sharing knowledge through documentation and media may happen through the use of guidelines, papers, briefing notes, standards, posters, stories, case studies, or videos. **Reading documents of different kinds** produced by others within the sector, or **watching videos**, are still seen as useful methods for learning. The level of detail in the documents needs to vary depending on the purpose. Short and to-the-point documents with key lessons are needed for general awareness raising, but more detailed practical guidance documents are needed to refer to when moving on to implementation of the new learning.

Various opinions of types and comprehensiveness of materials were revealed in the KIIs:

- *'For academic papers I would not read them beyond the abstract – the language is unappealing and I struggle to understand it.'*

- *'Implementation agencies are very practical – those guys are very much 'nuts and bolts' people – they don't use research pages – but if you turn it into a manual, they are much more interested.'*

- *'The 'Frontiers' are very useful – and you can go back to them. They have useful examples and are well written.'*[2]

But for longer guidance documents, several myths exist that have become barriers to their effective use. These perceptions were reinforced by a study by the Bremen Overseas Research and Development Association (BORDA) (Huber and Jennings 2018) that investigated learning related to faecal sludge management (FSM) in emergencies. People consulted were of the opinion that for guidelines:

> '(1) that consulting them takes too much time in an emergency and inhibits practitioners ability to respond quickly; (2) that the lack of context-specific guidance for the exact situation the practitioner is in would result in identifying contextually inappropriate solutions; and (3) that guidelines would prohibit experimentation and/ or innovation.' (Huber and Jennings 2018: 10)

Despite this, there remain large resources that are still being widely used. The example of *Menstrual Hygiene Matters* (House et al. 2012), co-published by 18 organisations in 2012, is interesting in relation to the value of more detailed documents for sharing learning, used to improve programming and action. It is a very long document – 352 pages in total – but has been widely used. In 2018 and 2019, it was still the second most downloaded publication from the programme pages of the WaterAid global website – six and seven years after publication (WaterAid, pers comm.). Why this large publication has still been widely used over time was posed to some interviewees. They suggested it may be:

1. Because there was a void in collated information on this subject at the time it was produced;

2. There was a high demand for the information;

3. Some documents are seen as 'landmark sector documents' or 'go-to documents' – this is one of them;

4. It has been produced in small parts that can be used as stand-alone and hence are not so daunting; and

5. It brought together practical examples of how things are currently being done in different parts of the world, which is easy for programme teams to spark ideas as to how to apply or adapt these approaches to their programmes (instead of a complexly worded in-depth more theoretical academic paper).

Skills for documenting and sharing good practice: For some people working in the sector, knowing what to write and how (Akpa and Allade 2018), can be a barrier to documenting and sharing their learning. In relation to the WASH sector in Nigeria:

> ***'A problem for learning is that we don't do enough documentation. We get learning from the community and could actually have something we want to share. At national level we have [WASH sector] community interaction but we don't have someone to compile learning. If this was consolidated, even if by NGOs, such as in newsletters, it would be useful'*** (KII).

One key informant observed that there are also limited **minimum standards** for the quality of responses in the development context – unlike the humanitarian context, where every five years the humanitarian sector updates a set of cross-sectoral minimum standards known as *Sphere* (Sphere 2018). It was posed, that the gap for the development sector, leaves people confused and

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[2] *Frontiers of Sanitation* series: https://sanitationlearninghub.org/current-thinking/slh-publications/

contributes to the poor quality of some work.

The **provision of guidance** on how to record and document can build confidence and improve the quality of outputs. WaterAid has provided guidance to its staff on how to document good practice (WaterAid 2018). It provides a template and tips and a document planning checklist. This checklist covers: audience, content, structure, appearance, style, writing habits, and quality.

There are also some useful examples where a range of **learning and its impacts has been synthesised to make it more accessible**. One of these is the *WASH Innovation Catalogue* for the humanitarian sector supported by ELHRA (2019) and another various synthesis of learning by the SHARE Consortium (Balls 2019; Balls and Madden; SHARE 2019), some of which are based on specific stories of change. *Stories of Change: Reflections from SHARE Phase I*, has documented three key areas of research and has followed them along the research and learning chain to try and identify changes that have happened and potential impacts from each.

Documenting and sharing stories on what has gone well and not gone well (see Section 6.2.1 for more discussion on 'learning from failures'), have also been noted as useful ideas for learning and influencing change, as well as case studies and stories for raising issues and bringing issues to life. In relation to this, a recommendation from the briefing note on KM by Akpa and Allade, is to 'Co-create stories with the field workers and give them credit' (2018: 3), something that is not always done. This publication and the KIIs revealed the value of stories:

- Sharing best practices with the media and a competition on innovation in Burkina Faso:

  'In Burkina Faso, **best practices are collated, published and shared in a meeting with the media** which is supported by UNICEF. Also, the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) organises a **competition on innovation and new approaches** where a winner emerges and an award is given as an incentive' (Akpa and Allade 2018: 2).

- Case studies for learning: An example was given of a case study of a girl who is a wheelchair user, which was documented in Tanzania. In this she was questioning, '***why am I able to use a toilet in school but not at home?***' The key informant felt that such case studies are very helpful to raise awareness of important issues (KII).

4.1.4 Alliances, networks and communities of practice (CoPs)

CoPs, alliances and networks, such as **SuSanA** and the UK based **SanCoP** offer a range of positive opportunities for learning, particularly at general awareness-raising levels, as well as all having their own limitations. They may target different, if somewhat overlapping target groups and are facilitated using different mechanisms, some remote and some face-to-face. There are some examples of active practitioner-based forums and alliances, such as the **Global Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) e-learning Alliance** (https://fsm-e-learning.net/), and the alliance focussing on container-based sanitation (see Box 3).

Box 3: Container-based Sanitation Alliance

A number of organisations active in container-based sanitation organised a toilet summit and formed a container-based sanitation alliance. The founders of the CBSA are Clean Team (Ghana), Loowatt (Madagascar), Sanivation and Sanergy (Kenya), SOIL (Haiti) and x-runner (Peru). Groups affiliated with CBSA include Sanitation First (India), MoSan (Guatemala), re.source sanitation, Non-Water Sanitation and WSUP. Their purpose is: to extend collective impact; to promote knowledge sharing and learning; to enhance legitimacy by creating a set of common CBS guidelines and standards;

to enable scale; and to create partnerships. One view on the CBSA is that it seems to work well, possibly because it is a small group of organisations and has been kept informal, often with only ten people in the room at a time. This makes sharing information and learning easier.

Source: CBSA 2019

Several communities of practice were shared as examples of useful learning opportunities being used within the sector. They have their limitations as with any approach, including the limited depth that it is possible to go in to on specific issues, but the opportunity to learn from and support others in their learning is valued:

- A **'Core Facilitation Team' (CFT) was established in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh** (House 2019) with the support of UNICEF and other key hygiene promotion actors, to bring together hygiene promotion staff from across agencies to improve the quality and coherence of the hygiene promotion efforts. The CFT is seen to have been effective, as the learning is facilitated in Bangla, is flexible based on on-going learning needs and has also been facilitated by a dynamic individual.

- An internal **CoP within WaterAid on the Healthy Start Campaign** (WaterAid n.d.) has also proven very effective. The success of the CoP and the campaign are seen to partly be due to the clarity of this externally facing campaign towards governments, World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Health Assembly, with the provision of practical guidance on how country programmes could engage; as well as the skills of the facilitator of the CoP.

- The UK based **SanCoP** was set up as a platform for early career researchers, students (MSc, PhD) and other researchers to come together with practitioners working on sanitation in low income contexts. It offers an opportunity for networking, as a reality check for the early career researchers and also an opportunity to challenge some of the older participants, some of whom it was noted can have entrenched views.

4.1.5 Conferences and learning and networking meetings

National sanitation conferences to bring together government professionals from across the country are seen as useful opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. It was also suggested that holding these at regional or district level would also be useful.

Box 4: National sanitation conference for District Health Officers

In Tanzania, a national sanitation conference brought district health officers from all over the country together as well as some external actors. It was felt to be a good platform for people to learn different things and create awareness from which detailed learning can follow. People shared challenges and reacted with discussions and increased understanding at this professional level.

Source: KII.

There were mixed views on international conferences, some people finding them useful for networking. Others questioned how much people really learn from them and if the information in

reality translated into action?

Learning and networking meetings and workshops are seen as important, particularly within organisations, although they cost significant amounts of money to bring people from different countries together. But they have hidden benefits and offer the opportunity for peer-to-peer learning, as well as having the opportunity for the advisors to pass information down and promote increased coherence across programmes. The **2016 regional learning workshops in Africa** organised by The Sanitation Learning Hub in partnership with other organisations such as UNICEF, WSSCC, WaterAid, AGETIP and SNV, received positive feedback. These workshops brought together actors from across the region to stimulate discussion and reflection (IDS 2018a and b). An email group was set up for each one, in which they discussed the participatory approaches used. People report finding the workshops stimulating and useful. The workshop raised awareness on reaching 'the last mile'/ equity and inclusion. The presence of international experts was valued, but concern was also raised over the fact that they seemed to be given a higher level of opportunity for sharing their views, than the many more local experts present.

One of the current gaps in learning events in the WASH sector, is that many are held at global or national levels, rather than at sub-national levels. All levels are needed for effective change. This positive example from Nigeria, provides an example of learning events at sub-national, ward and Local Government Authority (LGA) levels. 'In Nigeria, **WASH Clinics** are held to share innovations among implementers at the ward and LGA level. Government organises the review meetings, which are project based' (Akpa and Alade 2018: 2).

4.1.6 Workshops, face-to-face trainings and participatory approaches

Face-to-face training and workshops were mentioned by multiple respondents as still being very valuable, particularly for field-based staff. They give the opportunity to be away from your desk and to concentrate on learning, as well as offering the opportunity to reflect and learn from peers as well as the trainers. **Rapid Action Learning (RAL) workshops** (Chambers et al. 2018) have been supported by the Government of India for the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G), together with the IDS and the WSSCC. They are designed and facilitated to be participatory, informal, enjoyable and useful, and for sharing and learning horizontally peer-to-peer and between levels. Most interactions are sideways, not top-down. Senior staff are in a listening, not lecturing mode. They are focused on what is working, innovations and successes, as well as challenges and solutions.

A number of participatory techniques are available for gathering knowledge in workshop settings, one example being the **hunter-gatherer technique** as described below.

Box 5: Hunter-gathering technique

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... 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.

Source: The Sanitation Learning Hub: https://sanitationlearninghub.org/research-type/hunter-gathering/

There is more chance of getting people to 'wake up' to an issue if participatory exercises to make people think for themselves are used before the facilitator gives out any information. These are particularly valuable and powerful and are more likely to spark the 'lightbulb' or 'ah ha!' moment when thinking for themselves or being prompted by their peers.[3] These activities are similar to the triggering exercises used in CLTS at community level, but used with professionals, involving their peers to prompt them to think through issues together and suggest solutions through discussion. One KII respondent spoke about an **accessibility exercise** where some participants from his organisation were given artificial impairments or mobility challenges (one person who cannot see, a pregnant woman, a person who cannot bend their leg, and an older person with incontinence). The rest of the group watch them using a squat latrine and then discuss what they have seen. This exercise has also been used multiple times by the author of this report, for different participant groups, and sometimes participants with disabilities have volunteered to show the other participants the real challenges they face using a squat latrine. It is always impactful, with participants usually ranking this as the best or most useful session in workshops, in their feedback, even week-long workshops or trainings. A KII respondent noted about the accessibility exercise and other particular approaches that have made it to trainings for WASH actors:

- *'It is quite simplistic – but the participants loved it. They liked having a bit of hands on'* (KII).
- *'We have started the actual building of toilets and in humanitarian learning forums; and also, role playing on community negotiating and getting people to agree, when people are not listening'* (KII).

Key informants highlighted that simple exercises to help people get to the essence of learning are found to be particularly useful in workshops:

- *'When asked to put together a **poster** – the process of preparing one makes you think about it and makes you clearer - to be able to identify the nuggets'* (KII).
- *'The **SWOT tool** is quick tangible and organic to reflect on your contributions'* (KII).

4.1.7 Academic degrees and training courses

Traditional degrees and training courses are still needed and of value to professionals within the sector, including master's level courses. It has been noted that students have increased demand for more multi-media, interactive and participatory group teaching methods; but lecturers and trainers still note the need for some traditional teaching methods, providing information for the trainees, particularly for technical subjects. Integrating a mix of lecture type information, sharing, practical exercises and group work seems to be an appropriate mix for useful and effective learning.

Several key informants also voiced concern over the declining technical capacity in the sector, with few people who are now able to do technical calculations or other technical tasks with competence:

- *'The evaluations of trainings always indicate that the practical activities are most appreciated. They like getting outside and doing things physically. Participants also need the theory to be able to understand how to implement for some subjects (such as chlorination or borehole design). They may not like it, but they need it. We also do interactive activities in the classroom, such as calculations, but many people struggle with these'* (KII).
- *'People are more used to doing emails or reports vs. technical work. They are less numerate and capable and struggle to get to quantify and to think and estimate. For example, when asking how much groundwater recharge would be needed, people are often completely*

[3] The observations in this paragraph are from the experience of the author of this report through several decades of capacity building in the sector and also highlighted by respondents in the KIIs.

blank. So, I try to guide them… and then ask very specific questions like what the recharge can be less than… can it be more than annual rainfall? - but they still struggle to know how to go about it' (KII).

- *'Students teach us now about what they want us to do. There is much greater use of media – electronic media – video and slides on how it works. Students can do one-hour learning slots – but used to do three-hour, but didn't learn very well.' 'There is a huge resistance to hard documents'* (KII).
- *'People say how it all becomes so much clearer when they practically do something. So, we do both and have played around with the order. Initially we thought theory first then practice second. But now we do it the other way around – as then they more automatically ask questions – as the practice opens the person's mind to want to learn the theory'* (KII).
- *'I don't really believe learning happens without a degree of hard work on part of the learner – so the learner needs to have motivation, incentive and personal capacity and know how they best learn'* (KII).

4.1.8 Secondments / job immersions, visits and learning by doing and making mistakes on the job

Secondments or 'job immersions' are where a person immerses themselves in someone else's job for a period of time, to experience the day-to-day realities and challenges. These job immersions in other programmes, and 'learning by doing' and by making mistakes, were both noted as being particularly valuable for learning, although job immersions/shadowing and visits can potentially be costly if they involve travel and subsistence for large numbers of people.

4.1.9 Phone, email, social media, e-learning and Mass On-line Open Courses (MOOCs)

The use of phones, email, videos, social media (such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook and Twitter), webinars, e-learning and MOOCs, are all used for learning purposes in the sector. Webinars can reach people across multiple countries, but some respondents questioned their effectiveness in resulting in change on the ground. MOOCs have drawn in large numbers of trainees. Organisations are increasingly supporting their own e-learning internally.

Box 6: WhatsApp groups

In Nigeria, a WhatsApp group has proven very useful for sharing learning across the sector. People across the sector use it, although some still do not. It was initiated by one partner, Partnership Initiatives in the Niger delta (PIND), in 2015. The platform doesn't require any finance for its running as it depends on individual internet access. It was noted as being useful as you can throw up a topic and people contribute; such as when you are facing challenges and how to find solutions. For example, the importance of tradition and culture in relation to the effectiveness of triggering was discussed. (KII).

There has been an explosion in the use of WhatsApp groups to support and encourage sharing and learning in sanitation programmes. Though the level of engagement is encouraging more research is needed to unpack the usefulness of WhatsApp in sharing answers to persisting challenges implementers face and whether capacity is increased. A recent study in Indonesia reported that learnings can be instantaneous, but WhatsApp comments are difficult to find at later a date (KII) i.e. WhatsApp is good for getting a quick response to a particular issue, but does not provide a longer-term resource as a reference tool.

A number of MOOCs and online and distance learning courses are also being utilised in the sector:

1. Over 95,000 participants have enrolled in the **EAWAG MOOC** on-line courses in the series *Sanitation, Water and Solid Waste for Development*,[4] including more than 50 per cent from low- and middle-income countries, a large number from the WASH sector (KII).

2. **Distance and e-learning courses on WASH in Schools and on formative research for MHM** were supported by UNICEF and Emory University (Freeman and Sahin 2012). These were action learning courses which had mentoring and guidance integrated into the course. A lot of effort was put into developing and supporting these courses. The course involved the participants having to discuss and develop action plans and then to come back after some time to report on what happened. The trainings could be recorded and replayed by the participants, which included people from government, other implementing agencies and civil society. This was noted by one KII informant as particularly useful for participants from the Pacific who could not join in at the same times as participants from other parts of the world. It was felt to be good value for money. A similar course run for undertaking formative research for MHM (Caruso 2014), also involved local academics, hence building their capacity as part of the process.

Online learning and sharing however takes a lot of time and effort to make it work effectively. WaterAid ran a **MOOC on urban WASH**. It had an overall facilitator who spent approximately 15-18 hours per week for eight weeks and some trainers who spent 2.5-5 hours per week on it for six weeks. The facilitator followed up with the participants as to how they were progressing after week two and the trainers followed up three months after the course was completed as to how the participants had progressed with turning what they have learnt into action (KII).

4.1.10 Web and technical advisory platforms

There are several web and technical advisory platforms where sector stakeholders can ask questions and receive responses from experts. For example, see Box 7:

Box 7: KnowledgePoint – technical advisory forum to crowdsource support

Run by Register of Engineers for Disaster Relief (RedR) UK and partners WaterAid, Practical Action, IRC WASH and Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST), **KnowledgePoint** is a collaborative initiative to enable people in the field to have access to technical expertise from individuals with local or relevant experience from around the globe. It particularly aims to help staff from small NGOs and individual workers who do not have access to the same level of technical advisory support as is available within larger organisations. It is also useful for people in the field to be able to ask questions on unusual problems or specific challenges. It has over 1,800 registered users and more than 1,950 average visits per month.

Source: ELRHA 2019

4.2 Diversity of professionals involved in learning processes

There is a need to put more proactive attention to ensure the diversity and inclusion of the people who are undertaking learning and sharing opportunities in our sector and between our sector and others.

[4] www.eawag.ch/mooc (accessed 5 July 2020).

Peers learn very effectively by having the opportunity to work alongside other peers who have disabilities and face greater difficulties in communication or mobility, or peers who are from other marginalised groups. This is because they have the opportunity to see them as equals with capacities, to build relationships and to also to hear from them about the barriers and challenges they face. It can help change their mindset. However, when staff are from particularly marginalised groups, there may be ongoing tensions with staff from other groups. For example, such as people from the lowest caste, facing discrimination from people from higher castes. Care is needed to facilitate a supportive and inclusive working environment and to make sure that bullying, belittling and other forms of harassment, or violence will not be accepted.

There may also be a need for additional security or support for women working in challenging contexts or where travel on their own is difficult, particularly where there are very stark differences in power between males and females, for example:

- **In the Pacific, World Vision and CBM Australia undertook some research into how the WASH sector can work effectively with disabled person's organisations (DPOs).** Some of the recommendations included the importance of making sure that partnerships are **real** partnerships and people with disabilities have useful roles, rather than being token. They also stressed the need to make sure that people with disabilities and/or their DPOs should be adequately compensated for the time and effort they put into an activity or programme, as they are being engaged as experts and the DPOs often operate on a voluntary basis or with very little funds (CBM Australia n.d.).

- In Tanzania, when a national process was being established to develop the national School WASH (SWASH) guidelines and toolkit (IENDP 2011) **a formal partnership was formed between four key Ministries, one UN agency, two NGOs and with the national disability hospital, Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Tanzania (CCBRT), and through them a national DPO network** called *Shirikisho la Vyama Vya Watu Wenye Ulemavu Tanzania* (SHIVYWATA, or Tanzania Federation of Disabled People's Organisations). For all stages of the process, representatives with disabilities participated, including the final stages where key sector representatives went away on a retreat for a week, to review the initial drafts and to revise them. One of the participants who had a disability was a practicing lawyer who was blind. It was very interesting to see the changes in attitude and mindset of the WASH sector staff from the beginning to the end of the process. They became very impressed with the skills and contributions of the representatives with disabilities, through the opportunity to work alongside them.

5 Findings: Learning to action at scale

5.1 Factors and steps for turning learning into action at scale

There are multiple factors that affect whether learning can be turned into action at scale. Having access to information on new learning is just a first step. See Figure 3 which summarises the general order of steps that need to be passed through to turn learning into action at scale.[5]

These are laid out in stages below, but in reality a) the learning processes tend to be iterative, with small spirals, sometimes repeated, rather than one big loop; b) sometimes there is the opportunity to go directly from the learning to action, particularly on an individual or small-scale basis; and c) sometimes the learning to action process only gets part way through the steps and then falters, for example if decision-makers cannot be easily convinced that the issue is a priority.

[5] The concepts of debiasing and rigour are discussed further in Section 6.4.3 and 6.4.4.

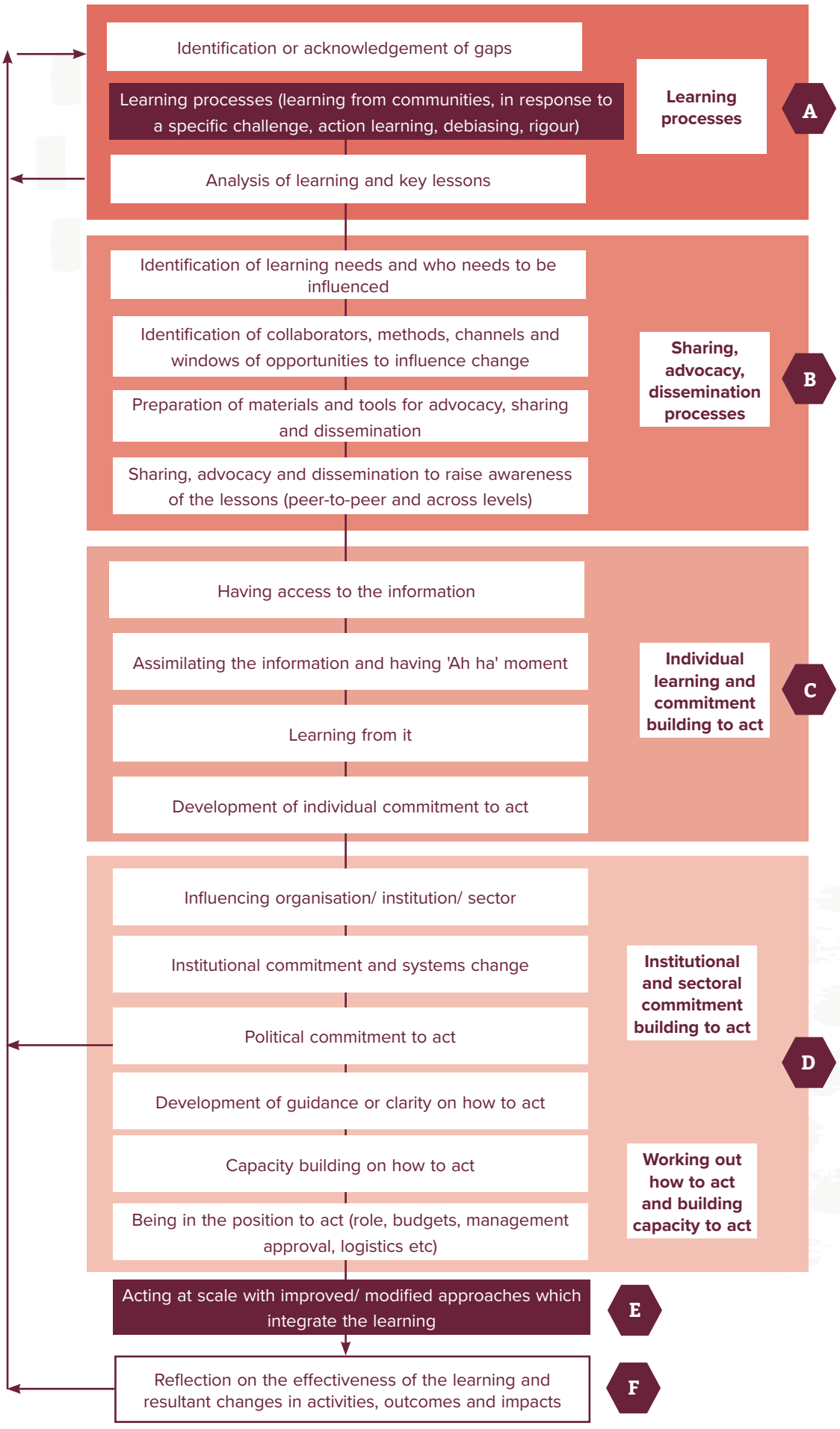

Figure 3: Turning learning from communities to action at scale. *Source:* Authors' own

5.2 Opportunities for speeding up turning learning to action at scale

Opportunities for speeding up the process of turning learning into action at scale include:

5.2.1 Engaging with government systems: at national and sub-national levels

The greater engagement that can be had with government at different levels from the earliest stage of the learning processes, involving stakeholders from district level and below, as well as decision-makers, the greater the opportunity to speed up learning to action at scale. **Rapid Action Learning workshops** were supported by the Government of India for the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin, together with the IDS and the WSSCC. These workshops were used at national level and in the States of Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand in India. The support agencies engaged at different levels of the government hierarchy and the majority of actors involved in the workshops were from government, including from senior levels (District Magistrates) who joined on the final day, which resulted in a higher level of buy-in.

Another key informant from an African country with responsibilities in government, said '***Activities cannot be done centrally – they are implemented from Local Government Authorities. If they are capacitated, they can go ahead and do them in the villages***' (KII).

5.2.2 Effective collaboration by agencies supporting governments, ensuring coherence

There needs to be coherence in the support provided to governments on learning and integrating this into strategies for action. Individuals and organisations who prefer not to collaborate, particularly when supporting governments with strategic developments, but instead promote their own organisation's name and priorities, lose multiple opportunities for the governments and people who they are supporting. It can waste time, cause confusion over differing approaches and also miss opportunities to bring in additional skills and knowledge.

5.2.3 Collaboration in learning, documentation and advocacy

Increased collaboration between agencies with joint ownership of learning and agreements on the way forward, can speed-up uptake at scale. The process of collaboration increases the buy-in, as well as knowledge of content, so this expands the use and dissemination opportunities for the document. An example of successful collaboration was for the development of the *Violence Gender and WASH (VGW): Practitioner's Toolkit*, which was co-published by 27 agencies. There were over 90 named contributors and it continues to be used five years after publication. It has been referred to in multiple other documents and guidelines and used in trainings for practitioners and it is also referred to in UN documents and commitments and government documents (Balls and Madden 2019). The VGW Toolkit was also referred to in two Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) aid reviews of DFID's work (Independent Commission for Aid Impact 2016a; Independent Commission for Aid Impact 2016b) as positive examples of their work. However, there are trade-offs in terms of the increased time and co-ordination necessary to successfully collaborate with large numbers of organisations. As this research was undertaken in the early stages of our learning as a sector about violence related to WASH, and the toolkit was large with multiple parts, a disclaimer was used. This was to give possible co-publishers the confidence that they would not have to agree with all of the content, before agreeing to co-publish. It emphasised that the co-publishing showed a commitment to continuing to learn and improve, rather than doing and recommending everything in the document.

5.2.4 Political advocacy and the enabling environment

Politicians and decision-makers need to be influenced in order to attain the commitment and support for taking forward learning. There needs to be political incentives for politicians to take

up and support lessons at scale. The enabling environment needs to be supportive for learning to happen, to influence actors at scale and to support wide-scale change on the basis of that learning. Key findings from research undertaken by WaterAid and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in India, Indonesia and Ethiopia, looking at how political will can be used to lead to action at scale can be seen in Box 8 which follows.

Box 8: Making sanitation happen: turning 'political will' into action: key findings

1. Values of modernity, along with political and professional advantage, can help galvanise prioritisation of sanitation. What is in it for me?
2. Competing incentives and power relations undermine prioritisation.
3. Incentives linked to professional and political advantage are crucial for course correction.
4. Nurturing a learning culture and creating robust verification reduces perverse effects of these incentives on reporting.
5. Giving the right people a stake in gathering and analysing information can incentivise them to use it for policy adaptations.

Source: Hueso and Maso 2016

5.2.5 Long-term partnerships, networks and coalitions, building capacities and training of trainers

The longer the partnerships and actions, the more likely there will be success in the learning, turning the learning into action, reviewing, modifying and improving the actions. Short-term or limited-scale programmes do not offer the same level of opportunity.

The following were suggested by respondents as offering positive opportunities for expanding the scope of learning at scale:

- **Local government networks** (ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability 2013; ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability 2019) offer an opportunity for advocating and sharing learning across these institutions, which tend to have the main responsibility for implementation or overseeing the implementation in their areas.
- **Existing national WASH networks**, such as the Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network (TAWASANET), offer the opportunity for engaging with a wide range of partners at the same time.
- **Strengthening national learning organisations**, through the training of facilitators and researchers, or through the establishment and management of resource centres or platforms.

Building capacities at individual, institutional, private sector and sectoral levels are essential for being able to turn learning into action at scale. To open up opportunities for learning to more people, there is also a need to train trainers and facilitators in the approaches and tools for effective learning and research, as well as how to document and share the learning.

It was also proposed that we should consider if there are opportunities to:

1. **Provide more opportunities for national and local experts** to undertake consultancy and research tasks, which also offers increased opportunity for expanding the impact of learning at scale. But this is still not being done in a systematic way.

2. **Link more with MSc and PhD students**, particularly those from low- and middle-income countries to make more of the opportunity for using their skills for the learning processes, as well as in parallel, to build their capacity.

3. Consider if there could be opportunities for the sector to develop some form of **accreditation for WASH sector staff**, with basic core competencies and a need for continued professional development targets, to encourage on-going learning as core to the WASH sector's work.

But one key informant with significant research experience said:

> '*Collaboration can be a challenge – everyone wants to own their research and use their own logo... research organisations are also trying to fight over pots of money and pay lip service to building southern researchers, but have vested interests for money coming in. There are some examples where research tenders say need X number of southern partners – but due to donor concerns regarding finance management their involvement is often minimal*' (KII).

Examples of coalitions and capacity building for impact at scale, including supporting government to take the lead in national learning processes, include:

- **A National Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) Coalition has been established in Tanzania** by a wide range of interest groups interested in learning and promoting improved support for MHH across Tanzania.[6] It has a rotating position of Chair. At the time of the writing of this report, the Chair was the WSSCC and the Co-Chair was UNICEF, but at the end of May 2020, the positions were transitioned to the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children Chairing and WaterAid Co-Chairing. It has more than 170 members across the country. It includes representatives from government agencies, UN agencies, the private sector, NGOs and research institutions as well as a number of Parliamentarians. They collaborate on different advocacy and learning activities, including engaging with and encouraging the media, and are in the process of developing a strategic plan. This identifies the barriers and opportunities to improving MHM for women and girls in Tanzania, which includes analysis of the areas in which the group feels able to influence directly themselves. On behalf of the MHM Coalition, UNICEF has recently supported the President's Office for Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) with funds for a nation-wide research into MHH in Tanzania. This has been undertaken by the National Institute for Medical Research, which is part of the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children. It will be used to inform evidence based MHH programming and major advocacy efforts with a wide range of stakeholders in the coming future.

- Under the Global Sanitation Fund, WSSCC also supported a number of teams from different countries to visit Madagascar to learn about the **Follow-up-Mandona (FUM) Approach** (Global Sanitation Fund/Fonds d'Appui pour l'Assainissement 2016) for following up on the progress of communities in attaining open defecation free status. They stayed for three to four weeks of intense work, rather than just a few days, and they were followed up when they returned to their countries, rather than just being left to their own devices. Several participants noted that they saw improvements at scale in their own countries, following this learning opportunity.

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6 Case study documented as part of a review on MHM by WSSCC in 2020.

5.3 Assessing the effectiveness of learning and sharing to action at scale

A range of methods are being used to try and measure the effectiveness of learning and the turning of that learning into action. These include those that: a) involve the mapping of activities and feedback on activities; b) look at the reach of outputs; and c) look at the uptake and use of outputs, outcomes and impacts. The methods are quite diverse, such as: citation tracking of publications, quantitative data on download of materials and accessing of webpages, to stories of change, contribution analysis, user outcome/impact surveys, outcome mapping and evaluations.

The need to focus more on outcomes rather than outputs was noted, and some progress has already been made in this direction. However, it was also acknowledged that it is difficult to assess effectiveness of learning from specific activities, i.e. the outcomes and impacts, because learning is a process and happens over time, with different opportunities for learning building on each other and contributing to the overall process of change. It can also be difficult to follow up with people at a later date, sometime after the learning activity has been completed, due to turnover of staff.

How the learning translates into policy and practice change is even harder to pin down. As Carter et al. stated:

> 'The ways in which practices and policies change are not simple… many political and personal factors combine to influence the uptake of evidence into changed policy and practice. It is more likely that change will result from a 'critical mass' of research on a topic, and perhaps form a particular 'tipping point,' than from an isolated research project' (2014: 1)

Effective feedback loops are also needed between monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and programming, but this does not always happen. M&E, as undertaken at present, is seen by some as not being particularly useful for implementors and being more for the benefit of donors and politicians wanting to prove success.

One key informant felt that the quality of the efforts to measure the effectiveness of learning would be improved if more resources were put into the activities to undertake such analysis and in particular to be able to visit communities on the ground and learn what had happened in programme areas and talk to staff directly. Whereas others felt that too much time is spent on M&E to the detriment of programming, with a question being asked as to whether as a sector we are suffering from 'obsessive measurement disorder?' (Pasanen 2019). It was also observed that we are often not realistic about what we should be expected to achieve in limited time-frames:

- ***'Often we don't go back – it would be good to go back and see if what we have supported is still functional – and to understand why and what enablers made it work' (KII).***
- ***'Timeframe – we are learning what works and need to be realistic if we have three, four, five years' funding. Rarely do we see plans of greater than five years and being realistic about what you can achieve in this time. Five years is both a long time and not very long' (KII).***

6. Findings: Barriers and challenges for learning and turning it into action

With the opportunities, there are also many barriers and challenges to learning and turning it into action – also known as translating **'learning and research into use.'** A range are highlighted in this section.

6.1 People working in the sector

6.1.1 Backgrounds of personnel, perceptions, attitudes and relationships

The wide variety of people in the sector with diverse backgrounds, poses challenges for learning and building capacities, as we all start from different baselines. There are also 'chasms' between levels, with less learning opportunities for local government and field level actors.

One participant highlighted that a group who are often overlooked are staff working for contractors. They are often used in the WASH sector for construction, and some organisations use them for all of their WASH work, for example the International Office for Migration (IOM) in humanitarian contexts. The need to make sure that contractors also have the opportunity for learning and are trained are also important. For example, the need for them to also commit to basic behaviours for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) was also raised in the audit of the work of the WASH sector related to gender, gender based violence (GBV) and inclusion in Cox's Bazar (House 2019).

Some assumptions are also being made about current commitments and capacities, but these are not always correct – for example: '***it is often assumed that women are better at considering people with disabilities, but some women can be quite negative on this***' (KII).

It was also observed that there are still biases against women and people from minority groups in the sector (examples given related to people who are sexual and gender minorities), which limits their confidence and opportunities to be themselves, to progress to senior levels and it may also affect learning opportunities.

It was also posed that to some degree we, as practitioners and researchers, have as a sector become 'numb' to the situation of people who may be most disadvantaged and the challenges they face; and as well as gaps in commitment, there may also be limited capacities and confidence to work with people who may be most disadvantaged. But barriers are also faced from the complex array of actors across other sectors who the WASH sector need to engage with to be able to engage and effectively support people who may be most disadvantaged (House 2019). In addition, barriers are also faced from the sensitivities over what is the 'most appropriate' or 'right' or 'most inclusive words' to use and fear of offending or being regularly criticised for using the 'wrong' words. Whereas in reality what words and terms that are considered acceptable, vary across countries and contexts and between individuals and change over time.

There are also some differences in the way people learn across regions and cultures, such as barriers from power differences, or women not being able to speak as easily in front of men, or being spoken over.

6.1.2 Attitudes of leadership and management on learning

The attitudes of leadership, management and human resources (HR) departments have a big impact on learning opportunities and the confidence of staff to spend time on learning, which spills over to practitioners who then are not comfortable to prioritise time for this in their work.

'*There are major barriers related to perceptions to do with time – actual or perceived time – practitioners feel they have none to spare. When they have this perception, all learning gets dropped and engagement with the community is rubbish. Corners are cut and we end up with secondary problems*' (KII).

HR teams can also influence learning, as they sometimes are the decision-makers on who can undertake learning activities. Sometimes this may not be based on actual learning needs, but on preferences for particular staff, or as a reward for other achievements.

6.1.3 Turnover of staff, lack of structured opportunities and repetition

The turnover of staff poses a significant barrier to organisational learning, as learning can be easily lost and needs to be repeated over time. The lack of structured opportunities in programmes and opportunities to 'pause and reflect' and then to use that learning to adapt programmes, also poses barriers. One key informant said, '***We need to put more effort into repetition and reinforcement. One-off mentions or trainings are not seen as being useful. We need to plug away with emails, skypes, trainings etc. and then to repeat the same***' (KII). This reinforces the point by others that what mostly influences change is when there are on-going 'nudges' to remind people of particular issues and why they should be responding to them.

6.2 What we learn and processes for learning

6.2.1 Learning from failures, failing forward or failing better

There is some fear of discussing and learning from failures, including because of fear that donors will stop providing funding and risks from the media. One key informant said, '***People are highly territorial – I often hear people bad mouth others. Knowledge management is also often focussed on trying to sell ourselves and linked to the individuals, rather than being real. These factors then also restrict willingness to share on failures***' (KII).

A positive effort to increase commitment to learn from failures has been the development of the **Nakuru Accord: Failing better in the WASH Sector**.[7] This aims to inspire people to publicly commit to sharing their failures and learning from one another. In July 2020, it had 212 sector professionals, 11 organisations and one event signed up.

6.2.2 Biases, jargon, languages, writing and reading skills and translators

There tends to be a strong bias towards written documentation and research and publishing, whereas shorter documents or more practical guidance with discussion and coaching, may be more useful. Jargon can also be problematic, including for people of different backgrounds as some key informants pointed out:

- '*We disable ourselves by our jargon – such as 'accountability' or 'mobilise'. I asked everyone in a room what they understood of the term accountability, as they use it all the time, but people did not know*' (KII).
- '*Some people are using jargon but doing nothing, while others are [not but] doing amazing things*' (KII).

The majority of learning is done in English, with occasional translation into French, Arabic and other languages. This poses significant barriers for people whose first language is not English. In response, WaterAid has increased its commitment to improving access to documents and regularly makes sure that they are available in three or four core languages – English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. They have also started translating draft reports into French, to allow French speakers

[7] https://wash.leeds.ac.uk/failing-better-in-the-wash-sector/

to contribute to review of documents, and they also support workshops in West Africa in dual languages with dual screens and parallel translation.

Some terminology also does not translate easily across languages. This also poses difficulties to be sure that the person being asked the questions fully understands the question, as well as their response. The skill of translation and working through translators when interviewing also poses challenges for ensuring the quality of learning – making sure that the translators translate exactly, and to not give prompts and examples within their questions, or to filter out parts of the response that they don't want the interviewer to hear.

Confidence in reading and writing skills also varies, with field workers often less confident in how to document and share their learning. People who have had less opportunity for education, such as people from minority groups, or some people with disabilities, may also have less confidence in this area.

6.2.3 Confidence and accessibility of information for people with disabilities

Most learning materials used in the sector may not be accessible for people with sight or hearing difficulties. People with disabilities may also need to have their confidence built, to be able to participate with confidence in sector learning activities and additional support may be needed to enable them to participate. For females with disabilities and people from minority groups with disabilities, they may have even less self-confidence having often been excluded or discriminated against on more levels in the past.

Support might involve funding an assistant to work alongside them, to provide large print documents, or to do supporting briefings prior to activities, to offer opportunities for them to be oriented and to be able to ask questions. Some practical suggestions include:

- When sign language services are needed, it is important to consider if the activities last several days, then two sign language interpreters are required to share the workload, as sign language requires significant concentration and work at speed.

- The CBM has prepared a very useful simple **2-page tip sheet for communicating with people with different impairments** (CBM Australia n.d.).

- In Nepal, the team from WaterAid and the London School and Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), together with local specialists, developed specific **visual aids for MHM for girls who have learning difficulties** as part of the '*Bishesta*' (which means 'extraordinary' in Nepali) campaign (WaterAid and LSHTM 2020).

  > '***Our creative team then met to design the intervention. The creative team members were important – we had the founder of the Down Syndrome Society Nepal (DSSN), who's also a mother of a young man with Down syndrome, government social mobilisers from Kavre, implementing organisations (KIRDAC and CIUD), WaterAid staff, an artist and an entrepreneur. As a group, we reviewed the formative research findings to understand what was limiting the ability of people with intellectual impairments to manage menstruation hygienically and with as much independence as possible. Then we identified what they and the carers could do differently to make this happen – and named these our 'target behaviours***' (Jane Wilbur, LSHTM).

They then came up with the approach for how to share the good practices and for two-way communication with the young women living with intellectual impairments, which included using a doll and pictures (Wilbur 2018).

6.3 Volume, quality and priorities for learning

6.3.1 Huge amounts of information and multiple recommendations

The huge amount of information and multiple recommendations coming out of different learning processes, pose challenges for effective learning and turning the learning into action. There is a need for effective curation and prioritisation of information and recommendations, to simplify to the core learning and identify the core blockages to respond to.

The KIIs and a study supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Cranston 2014) highlighted the need to simplify what we share, to cut down on the 'noise' to get to the most important issues, and the importance of saying no to some things, were also highlighted:

1. There is a need to sometimes say no to some things, as we tend to jump from training to training and trying to do too many things, but don't take time to apply what we have learned.

2. There is a need to learn how to better simplify – we need to ask the big questions:

    - What is the purpose;
    - Who are the target group;
    - How is the info going to be useful – cut out the other information – to make it more targeted.

3. 'Less is more' – reduce the 'signal to noise' ratio – more curation and targeting of knowledge products.

6.3.2 Ethical issues, doing no harm and risk of bias in community responses

There are several ethical risks when undertaking learning at community level, in particular with people who may be most disadvantaged, as we can potentially put people at more harm. For example, if we would like to be more inclusive of people who are sexual and gender minorities (SGM), there is a significant risk that we may make them more at risk of violence, by identifying them to ask their opinions and needs. Care must be taken to ensure that sector actors understand these risks and good practices to ensure that we Do No Harm. For example, a national study in Bhutan to investigate who has been left behind in the National Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Programme (Choden and House 2019), integrated training on Doing No Harm into the training for the study team, before it progressed.

There are also risks from communities perceiving researchers and learners negatively and also by not being honest, so care is needed to communicate clearly with communities and their leadership on the purpose of the activities and what will be done with the information. A policy brief on engaging participants in community-based research, highlighted some issues around community perceptions of researchers coming into their communities (see Box 9).

There are also a range of ethical issues in taking of photographs and using them, including uploading them to social media. It has become common practice that people take photos on their mobile phones on an ongoing basis and upload them to Facebook or other online platforms. However, there are ethical issues of doing this without the express permission – informed consent – of the people from whom you are taking them, particularly when the people in them are particularly poor or vulnerable. There are quite diverse approaches to this being used at present by different organisations in the sector, but also increasing debate and guidance appearing (Idris 2014; Maunder and Crombie 2019).

Box 9: Concerns raised by communities over the way researchers behave – 'bloodsuckers'

'The Centre for Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Appropriate Technology Development (WASHTED) at the University of Malawi, has been undertaking community-based research in Malawi for many years and has been adhering to good practice. However, it became evident from recent community encounters, and a recent national hysteria of 'bloodsuckers,' that an open dialogue was needed on the relationship between researchers and participating communities for long term engagement.

Through a small grant for public engagement funded by the LSHTM, the SHARE Consortium, WASHTED, University of Strathclyde and the WATERSPOUTT Consortium, convened a community dialogue event to explore issues of trust around community-based research.' (pp1-2)

'Participants expressed concerns about the way that some researchers have come into communities without using appropriate structures and communication channels, and without respecting local cultural customs. During data collection, participants spoke about a lack of understanding of study eligibility criteria, misconceptions around taking human samples, and lack of communication about other research methods. Participants felt it was particularly important at the end of data collection, that they receive feedback on what researchers found.' (p3)

Source: Chidziwisano et al. 2018

6.3.3 Errors, myths, biases and blind spots

There are multiple common errors and myths that exist within the WASH sector (such as those based on power and personal interests, not fully understanding and checking data, and undertaking selective visits), as well as our own biases (these may come from our backgrounds and personal perspectives) and blind spots (both deliberate and accidental). We need to become more aware of what these are and to strategise to minimise any negative effects from them.

Box 10: Sources of errors and myths

Examples of sources of errors and myths include those from power and personal interests, ego, pride and status, propagating findings that conveniently confirm beliefs, and extrapolating out of context. Biases and blind spots may be due to 'strategic ignorance' when we do not wish to know something, or due to 'tactics,' such as shelving a report, keeping it confidential, editing it, or limiting its circulation. Biases can also occur due to spatial focus, such as prioritising visits to communities near to the 'tarmac' or the airport, or only going on visits during certain seasons. There may also be diplomatic biases, in being reluctant to broach sensitive subjects.

Source: Chambers 2017

6.3.4 Qualitative and quantitative approaches and rigour

There has been a polarisation and tension between the value being placed on quantitative versus qualitative approaches. Part of this derives from differences in practitioner and researcher's views. Practitioners often struggle to make use of academic studies and papers and there is still divergence on understanding between some academics and practitioners on the relative value of different kinds of research and learning.

Divergent opinions shared included those related to the huge sums of money spent on quantitative Random Control Trials (RCTs) and whether in turn these large-scale studies are very useful as they focus on only one specific area and cannot understand the complexity of situations, and also whether they are ethical in relation to the control group. Whereas on the other side, arguments were also shared on qualitative approaches to learning, with questions on the tendency for making assumptions from small numbers of activities and a lack of perceived rigour in establishing the findings.

In general, however, respondents confirmed that in reality both have value for different purposes and there are different kinds or rigour.

Box 11: Navigating between practitioner views and researcher views

'Researchers may have weak understanding of what practical questions are relevant in a particular context, and of what policy impact aims are politically plausible. Furthermore, career researchers may have their own motivations for doing particular types of research, in order to build their expertise and publications record in a particular area of specialisation, which can be very narrow.'

'Conversely, sector professionals often have weak understanding of how to design and deliver research, and what types of question can be usefully answered by research. If we simply follow practitioner suggestions, we may end up with a technical consultancy that meets an institution's immediate needs but has no real pro-poor impact on policy or practice, and generates no knowledge of wider value.'

Source: Charles et al. 2019: 2

However, collaboration between practitioners and academics to undertake research can also be successful. **ELHRA and the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (2019), has brought together practitioners and academics to undertake research**, and there have also been positive examples of independent collaboration between the sector and particular academics, where research and learning has been developed with practical recommendations for application. For example, academics at Tufts University, who have supported the WASH sector to unpack a number of practical challenges to develop simple solutions, such as how to effectively clean water containers, and for the spraying of chlorine in outbreak contexts (Lantagne n.d.; Yates et al. 2017).

Various respondents suggested it would be positive for more work to be done to bring people with varying views to mutual understanding of the value of different approaches for different purposes. New approaches to rigour for qualitative activities have been proposed (Chambers 2017).

6.4 Capacities for research and learning

6.4.1 Capacities of in-country institutional partners for learning and research

Capacities of in-country institutional partners can have a big impact on the ability to turn the learning and research into use.

Box 12: Finding strong in-country institutional partners for RIU

'Research-into-use programmes in the development context need some sort of partnership with in-country institutions: a) to ensure strong representation of in-country views on what research is useful and appropriate, b) to increase feelings of in-country ownership and thus enhance prospects of achieving research uptake, and c) to ensure that the programme investment contributes to research capacity development in the research countries, not just in London and Oxford' (p3)

REACH says: 'We have found working with academics with close ties to government or stakeholders, such as those who sit on committees or provide training and expert advice, to be effective. Researchers in those roles already have regular interactions with change-makers, and know their needs, so can help to design effective work and communicate it regularly and effectively.' (p3)

Additional challenges

- How we can bring Southern Universities on board more effectively, and that Northern Universities bid infrequently, particularly UK ones, due to their high overhead costs.
- It is also recommended that a targeted approach is needed related to research on gender, rather than assuming that gender mainstreaming will work on its own.
- There is a risk of equity drift, with political pressure during the research process, moving the research away from focus on low-income communities.

Source: Charles et al. 2019

6.4.2 Opportunities, resources, expectations and capacity of facilitators and trainers

The opportunities and resources for learning vary across agencies and levels of staff. There is also a tendency to have very high expectations of what will happen as a result of learning in workshops or trainings; but we need to be more realistic. It is not realistic for all participants to take the learning and use it immediately. Some will, but others may not be in a position to do so during the immediate period of time after the workshop. The capacity and confidence of facilitators and trainers also varies, including in the facilitation of participatory techniques and on the documentation of learning.

6.4.3 Sharing across agencies, doing what we have always done and following fashions

Sharing across agencies varies, with some respondents feeling that learning within organisations is often more effective, rather than between them. Some respondents noted that there is a lot done, as '***it is how we have always done it***' (KII), and also that we can have the tendency to follow fashions.

It was also noted that there are a few select players at international level, who tend to have the most influence on trends, such as The Bill and Melinda GATES Foundation, IRC and the African and Asian Development Banks. They may initially learn from others, but it is often not until they take the issue up as their own, that change happens at scale.

6.4.4 Dilemmas for learning and sharing organisations

Dilemmas for learning and sharing organisations include: how to balance open learning, versus the sharing of good practices; how to keep in touch with the field, as well as facilitate learning for sector professionals; and how to get people's attention and sell the benefits of learning. There are also dilemmas on how to determine the limits of their responsibilities and in which way should their success be measured. This is particularly true if the learning is to be turned into action, as it will involve multiple other actors as well.

6.5 Complexity, gaps in political will, the enabling environment and time-lags

6.5.1 Multiple needs across sectors and political prioritisation

Sanitation and hygiene are only one issue which people in government are supporting and hence they are competing with other priorities for attention and resources – '***sanitation and hygiene are not in a vacuum***.' Sanitation and hygiene also have strong linkages to a number of other issues, such as nutrition, health, economics, GBV etc.; hence there is a need to engage across sectors in order to influence change at scale on sanitation and hygiene, and also to influence at a political level.

In addition, the attitudes and priorities of politicians and decision-makers to support sanitation and hygiene actions at scale, can also pose significant barriers to translation of learning at scale, including due to vested interests.

Box 13: Achieving research uptake

Systematic planning blended with pragmatism: 'Getting research into use is important, and it must be systematically planned and budgeted for. A great deal more could be done to communicate research findings simply and effectively in ways which connect key stakeholders. However, the ways in which the evidence generated by research influences change in practice and policy are complex; they involve politics and personalities, power and vested interests; and so, we need to be realistic about what can be achieved.' (Carter et al. 2014: 1)

Lessons on research-into-use in the 'real world': 'Delivering high-quality research can be challenging. But achieving research uptake – impact on policy or other aspects of the "real world" – is enormously challenging. In low-income contexts the barriers to achieving change can seem profound, in view of economic and capacity limitations. In fact, achieving policy change may not necessarily be more difficult in low-income contexts than in wealthier contexts (for example, Rwanda and Kenya outlawed plastic bags almost overnight, whereas even the most ambitious EU countries set targets three to five years into the future). Nonetheless, it's clear that using research to drive meaningful change is far from straightforward.' (Charles et al. 2019: 1)

6.5.2 Gaps in the enabling environment

The enabling environment also has a critical influence on whether learning and adaption are encouraged and how easy it is to be able to take that learning and to turn it into action at scale. The WSUP's *Urban WASH Sector Functionality Framework* (Drabble et al. 2018) provides a useful visual overview of the different components that make up the enabling environment. The enabling environment that supports progress in sanitation and hygiene at scale includes a number of components. It requires: a supportive legal and policy framework and the implementation and enforcement of its components; adequate finance and resources; effective institutions and organisations, including government, non-state actors and civil society, with clear coordination, roles and responsibilities; and mechanisms for social dialogue including participation of stakeholders. This means that the enabling environment is also complex, and when it has weaknesses, this can also pose barriers to turn the learning into action at scale.

6.5.3 Time-lags for undertaking research and turning it into use

Issues raised related to time-lags, include preparing calls for grants, commissioning, grant start up, consultation, research planning and design, and the research itself, which all take a long time. 'Policy change takes a very long time!' (Charles et al. 2019: 4)

7. Recommendations for the sector

The following are recommendations for strengthening learning processes within the WASH sector and for turning that learning into action at scale.

7.1 Strengthening learning and sharing processes

1. Share experiences of how learning happens within our organisations, identifying and sharing examples of good practice – in particular, how to systematize reflection, learning and turning this into action. Pay more attention to the most effective methods and to strengthen the quality of learning opportunities.

2. Pay more attention to how to learn better from communities and in particular from people who may be most vulnerable, marginalised or otherwise disadvantaged, including how to 'Do No Harm' and trialling less commonly used participatory methodologies to establish how learning from communities can become more effective.

7.2 Improving the quality of learning processes

3. Encourage sector actors to be more open about challenges and learning from things that did not work as planned/learning from failures. Sign the **Nakuru Accord**: https://leeds.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/nakuru

4. Reflect on our own common errors, myths, biases and blind-spots and consider how to reduce or minimise negative impacts from them.

5. Increase the diversity of opportunities for learning and contributions to learning, considering the barriers that different people may face in being able to take part, including for people of different genders, age, backgrounds and for people with disabilities.

6. Review M&E systems to consider how useful they are for learning for programmes and strengthening the evidence base in a useful way; in conjunction with donors, consider if they can be modified to increase usefulness for on-going learning for programmes, and turning this learning into action.

7. Reflect on different kinds of rigour and the value of qualitative versus quantitative approaches, bringing together people supporting the different kinds of research and learning on the spectrum, for increased mutual understanding and respect of the different purpose for different methods.

7.3 Building capacities and confidence for learning

8. Increase attention to supporting opportunities for learning for local government and field staff, who tend to have less opportunities than people working at headquarters, nationally or internationally.

9. Build capacities and confidence in how to learn, document and share learning, particularly of staff working in the field and at local government levels.

10. Consider if there could be opportunities for the sector to develop some form of accreditation for WASH sector staff, with basic core competencies and a need for continued professional development targets to encourage on-going learning as core to the WASH sector's work.

11. Consider if there are opportunities to link more with MSc and PhD students (particularly who are from low- or middle-income contexts) and to strengthen existing in-country networks or learning organisations to be able to facilitate learning and sharing more effectively; including through training of facilitators and researchers, or establishment and management of resource centres or platforms.

7.4 Turning learning into action

12. Increase collaboration and coherence of support to government by external agencies, particularly when integrating learning onto the development of updated and new strategies – don't confuse government staff and waste time, resources and efforts by different agencies unilaterally promoting their own priorities and approaches.

13. Increase leadership for learning by and engagement with government at different levels, including at both local government and senior decision-making levels.

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SLH Learning Paper

Learning in the Sanitation and Hygiene Sector

This *SLH Learning Paper* summarises the key learning from a rapid topic exploration on 'Learning in the Sanitation and Hygiene Sector'. The study looked at how people in the WASH sector learn, the processes utilised and what works best, as well as the barriers and challenges to learning. It looks at learning from communities and peer-to-peer and how the learning gets translated into action at scale. How do you think we learn best? What barriers do you see and experience that make it more difficult for us to learn? And what steps should be taking to reduce the barriers and improve how to learn more effectively? This paper shares the lessons from sector and associated actors working in low- and middle-income contexts around the world and makes recommendation on how to strengthen learning and sharing processes, as well as building capacities and confidence for learning, with the ultimate aim of turning that learning into action at scale.

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