Learning from failure in sanitation

Posted by christoph - 28 Dec 2012 23:17

Dear all,

thanks to sanitation updates I came across this blog about failure . A very, very interesting topic and very difficult to discuss. Most of the arguments are very nicely expressed. It is very easy to say it's necessary to talk openly about failure when on the other hand projects are related to money for the next project. I really would be interested hearing more about this issue. Does anyone have more information?

Yours Christoph

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Re: failure

Posted by sjoerdnienhuys - 30 Dec 2012 09:29

I often felt that from failure you learn more than from best practices, but as explained in the: BPD Blog – Learning from failure in sanitation, Posted on December 27, 2012 by WASHplus, NGOs fear publishing failures, even not as a learning proces because they are afraid to lose donors.

Yet many NGOs are in the frontline of new developments and changing behaviour and things tend to go wrong all the time. Studying why, and than doing it better is essential.

"In an early UDDT project I worked in, we worked out the dry composting technology and installed some at primary schools. A few years later we came across one school where the UDDT was blocked and used as a dumpstore, while the children defecated behind the building. When asked how this situation could develop the answer was three fold: 1) the small children do not know how to use it; 2) we, the teachers, do not want to clean the toilets; and, 3) there is no wash water provided.

A small permanent water channel was behind the school and used by all for filling the jar for anal cleaning, making the point 3 not true. What remained was mainly point 1.

At home most of these children only had a pit latrine, and only very few a pour-flush.

After the first year in use, there had been no training on the use of the UDDT for the new (very small) school children, hence they soiled the place.

The lesson learned was that the project not only needed to train all involved with the installation of the UDDT, but also provide a system to assure that every year a refreshing training for teachers and new school children is realised. In fact, the parents of all the school children should have been trained/educated also.

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