Good afternoon, I’m Susan Davis from Improve International.

In the development world, money makes the world go around.

Donors large and small from many countries have funded efforts to address water issues for decades. This is good news.

But is all this money leading to good work?
Unfortunately, many people who thought they had improved water access don’t know it will come every day, and they don’t know whether it is safe to drink.

This chart shows estimates of water point non-functionality from several African countries in 2007.

More recent national monitoring efforts indicate non-functionality is still unacceptably high.
Water services are not just about functionality.

Water systems that are considered functional can have poor quality, quantity, reliability, accessibility.

This functional water point in Ethiopia serves too many people, resulting in a two-hour wait each day.
For years, we’ve been examining why water points fail, but what’s most important?

- Inappropriate technology?
- Poor management?
- Not enough funds for maintenance?
- Poor implementation?
- Weak support by local government?

Or some complex combination – ingredients and amounts unknown. A failure smoothie.
But we haven’t looked rigorously at how development is funded – the power part of this blender metaphor.

Ideally, we could track the results of different types of grants (for example, shorter vs. longer time frames) over time.

But often, unrestricted and restricted funds are blended to cover the full cost of a program.
Development folks, have you had these conversations over coffee, tea, or cocktails?

“Donors are so hard to work with”

“The proposal process is draining”

“If only they would fund more overhead, monitoring, or capacity building.”

Sorry, donors!

We decided to find out more, and share with donors in a safe (anonymous) way.
It was wonderful when the WASH Sustainability Charter was developed.

It put us all on the same level.

It came out of an earlier version of this Sustainable WASH Forum.

It was endorsed by more than 100 organizations in 2011, including some donors.

This was going to change everything. Right?
It has been five years since the WASH Charter came out.

Did it influence how WASH interventions were funded?

Did this in turn improve the services provided over time?

There’s not much information to make these connections.

In place of evidence, we asked some implementers their perceptions.
We sent an online survey to more than 700 international WASH organizations who might receive US funding.

We told them their responses would be anonymous.

We received 40 qualified responses from a diverse set of organizations.

I’ll share the most important findings with you.
This shows the top five reported restrictions.

The two most common were that donor measurements of success are primarily number of water points, toilets, or direct beneficiaries and no funding for long-term post-project monitoring.

Do these sound familiar?
Which restrictions affect sustainability? Here are the top four responses.

The pink and red bars are the key here.

No funding for monitoring was the restriction perceived by most respondents to hinder sustainability of WASH interventions.

You can’t manage what you can’t measure.
67% of the respondents said that sustainability would improve if grants were awarded in line with the WASH Sustainability Charter.

One commented that the Charter addresses often neglected topics such as improving governance and accountability structures in institutions and communities.
What activities are generally underfunded? We’re just showing the top five here.

The top two reported underfunded activities were monitoring and evaluation after programs, and resolution of problems identified after a program.

You’re probably surprised not to see overhead here, but it was number 6.
We asked: What is the biggest obstacle for your organization to contribute to lasting water or sanitation services?

Respondents mentioned in descending order,

overall inadequate funding
short-term funding cycles
lack of funding for post-implementation activities
limited funding for overhead or staff time
64% of respondents said that donors asked to receive feedback from beneficiaries.

This feedback is provided in stories, reports, status updates, quotes, case studies, videos, and during donor site visits.

We didn’t ask whether the feedback was addressed.
This survey reveals a lack of alignment between the needs of WASH organizations and funding methods.

Perhaps if donors and development organizations collaborate, communicate more openly about limitations on both sides, compromise, and be creative, long-term sustained water and sanitation services would be more likely.
So what are the next steps?

We plan to distribute this survey annually to get more opinions and see whether alignment is changing over time.

We have partnered with a graduate student, who interviewed foundations and their grantees to discuss whether funding restrictions have impacted sustainability of WASH interventions.
In summary, we found it is difficult to link evidence of sustained success to funding methods.

BUT, we hope this information will 1) help development organizations have more candid conversations with donors about how their investments can be more powerful, and

2) Encourage donors to fund in ways so that none of their money is “evil” 😊
What might water services look like in 10 years if donors followed the WASH Sustainability Charter and aligned their goals and funding methods with those of governments and development partners?

By investing in people, not just projects, could we contribute to systemic change?

I bet success smoothies taste better than failure smoothies.
Do the results of this survey reflect your experience?

Have you found a way to help donors better align with sustainability principles that you’d like to share?

Are you a donor who funds in line with the WASH Sustainability Charter or something similar?

Please get in touch and thank you for listening.