



**IMPROVE**  
INTERNATIONAL

**DO DONORS INFLUENCE  
SUSTAINABILITY OF WATER,  
SANITATION & HYGIENE (WASH)  
INTERVENTIONS?  
RESULTS FROM A SURVEY**

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**2017**

1

Most respondents believe the ways donors fund influence sustainability of WASH interventions.

Same in 2016

2

Most respondents think donors are pretty good or okay at funding sustainable WASH services.

Same in 2016

3

More than half of respondents said monitoring and/or evaluation *after* programs was underfunded.

Same in 2016

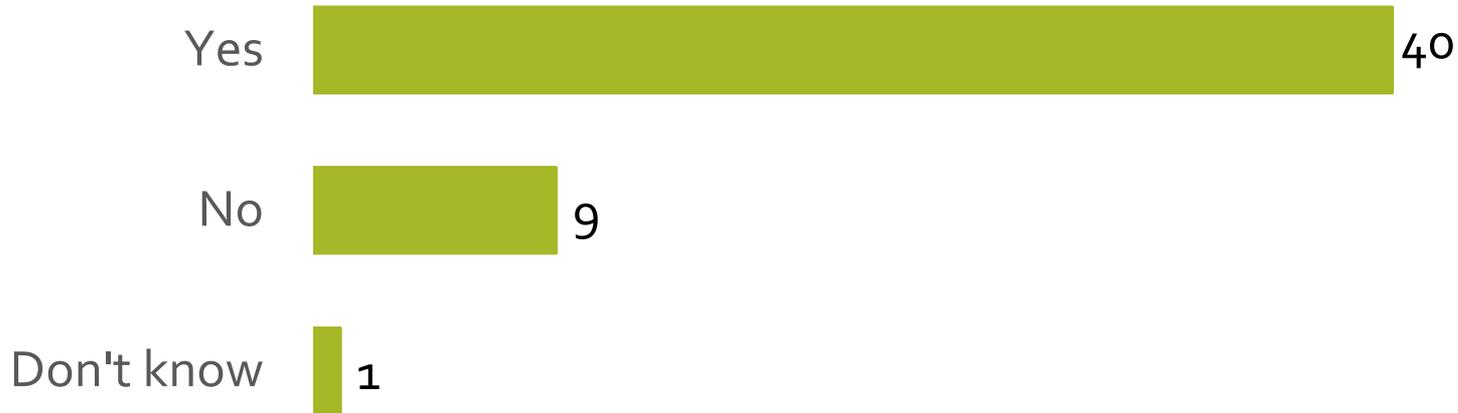
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While funders can be obstacles to sustainability, many respondents have donors that allow flexibility to innovate or adapt

New questions

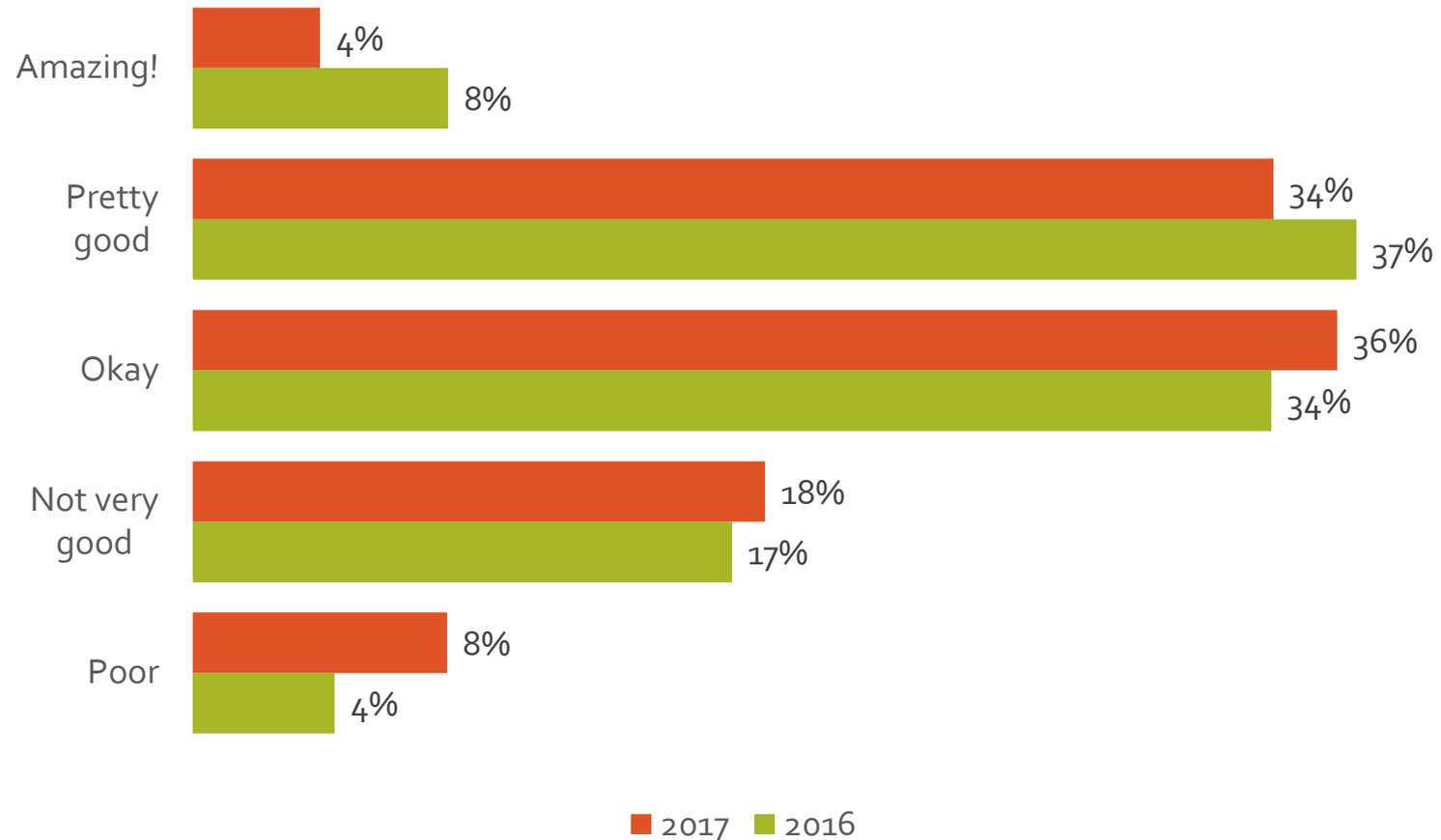
# THERE IS HOPE: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM 2017 SURVEY

# Most respondents believe the ways donors fund influence the sustainability of WASH services



Survey question: Do you think that the ways donors fund influence the sustainability of water services, sanitation services, or improved hygiene behaviors? (50 respondents)

# Most respondents think donors are pretty good or okay at funding sustainable WASH services



Survey question: Overall, how good are your donors at funding sustainable services? (50 respondents)

# Why they chose that rating

“We conduct 15-20 project/strategy evaluations per year....[M]ost of them cover sustainability which is - most of the time - a weak point.”

“In many cases, those donors that do require rigorous approaches or research on sustainability help to inform all other programs (as we try to embed those learnings into programs regardless of requirements).”

“Congruity from core donors - particularly Government donors - is a challenge. The focus is often on how they can spend their money and not the lasting impacts beyond grant life”

“Many donors are not interested in monitoring projects or long term follow-up.”

Survey question: Do you have any evidence to support your rating above? (selected quotes). 16 answered No; 15 answered Yes and gave relevant examples.

# But funders/funding are considered one of the biggest obstacles to WASH sustainability

Categories of responses (40 responses total):

- Funders (17 respondents)
- Implementation (16 respondents)
- Services (7 respondents)
- Stakeholders (6 respondents)
- Government (1 respondent)

Examples of responses follow.

Survey question: In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle for the WASH sector to contribute to lasting water services, sanitation services or lasting hygiene behavior change?

# Funding can be an obstacle to WASH sustainability

“Understanding the natural cycles of projects and that we can’t always see a direct, instant return for funds.”

“Under funding because of limited understanding of WASH interventions that are behavior related.”

“Investment in social change needs to be more robust and longer term.”

“The biggest challenge is getting donors to embrace and fund integrated, multisectoral funding and not be very vertically focused on [a] single sector.”

[Lack of] “Ongoing resources for monitoring and resolution of problems”

“it is required to accept that often blended finance of WASH facilities is and remains required, meaning input of external money as part of the equation.”

# Implementation can be an obstacle to WASH sustainability

“Way too much emphasis on ‘market-based approaches’ especially in low-income, high poverty settings.”

“Institutional blindness to why projects really fail - such as poor user-satisfaction and lack of affordable systems that perform well.”

“Sector needs to switch from its current access & infrastructure focus to a behavior & social norms change (especially in terms of accepting the 'real' cost of sustainable WASH services).”

“Lack of common indicators”

“Lack of understanding about what are the key issues”

“assumption that everyone is a willing and able beneficiary”

[Lack of “collaboration across the full ecosystem:”

“no post-project monitoring, and as such, an assumption that everything works forever”

“Not recognizing capabilities of local staff.”

# Other obstacles to WASH sustainability

"[T]here must exist clear economic incentives to ensure that continued service provision under the new format is an attractive proposition for end users and those responsible for service delivery."

[Lack of] "long-term WASH technology uptake and use, beyond initial training."

"weak management and governance"

"Assuring water safety at point of consumption (due to improper handling/lack of hygiene)"

"Community services face management problems and lack of willingness to pay for water"

# Selected quotes about funding

“We have worked with funders so that they change the way that they fund us. . . .All of the projects must include governance and management/sustainability components....”

“Funds have been for design and construction, but the ‘talk’ on sustainability is good. We emphasize planning for life-cycle [operations and maintenance].”

“Donors support [us] because they deem it necessary to go beyond infrastructure and strengthen governance.”

# Selected quotes about funding

“Majority [of donors] understand need to invest in on-going support to ensure longevity of interventions.”

“[F]unding times are too short to implement sustainable projects and support proper succession planning.”

“Most donors are not interested in ongoing training and contact with communities after project close.”

“They are interested in sustainability but focus more on high beneficiary numbers.”

# Many respondents have donors that allow flexibility to innovate or adapt during implementation



Survey question: In general, how many of your donors allow flexibility to innovate or adapt the program to address risks during implementation? (49 respondents )

# Donors are less likely to request information on local leadership and environmental issues in proposals

Donors ask us to address this in proposals	% of Respondents			
	All	Some	Few	None
Technical	26	13	5	2
Financial	24	14	7	1
Social / behavioral	22	13	12	2
Institutional / governance	21	16	4	3
Local leadership	16	17	12	1
Environmental	14	17	13	5

Survey question: Which of these items do donors ask you to address in proposals? (50 respondents)

# Top 5 restrictions on WASH donations

	2017 (n=62)	2016 (n=112)
Project time frame	64%	72%
No or limited funding for overhead costs	58%	56%
Donor wants funds to support a specific community	48%	56%
Matching donation requirements	44%	52%
Cost per person	38%	30%

Survey question: What restrictions have your donors placed on their donations for WASH programs? (50 respondents)

# Top 10 underfunded activities

	2017 (n=50)	2016 (n=112)
Research	56%	58%
Monitoring and or evaluation <i>after</i> a program	54%	59%
Professional development of your organization's staff	52%	55%
Software (training, community engagement, government engagement)	52%	38%
Resolution of problems identified after the project	50%	45%
Knowledge management and learning	48%	49%
Professional development of local government or partner organizations	48%	47%
Overhead	44%	43%
Adaptation and innovation	42%	38%
Systems change	38%	42%

Survey question: Which activities are generally under-funded for your organization? Select all that apply.

# Chief reporting requirements

Number of direct beneficiaries	88%
Measurements of success such as number of water points, toilets, people who receive hygiene training	74%
Cost per water point or cost per beneficiary	46%
Post-project water or sanitation service levels	36%
Customer satisfaction	26%

Survey question: What are your donors' chief reporting requirements for WASH programs? Select all that apply. (50 respondents) Not asked in 2016.

# About the donors described in this survey

From 34 different countries; but primarily US-based

Includes foundations, national governments, UN organizations, aid agencies, and World Bank

Headquarters for top 5 funders	Number of respondents
USA	74
UK	18
Netherlands	12
Germany	9
India	7
Sweden	6

Survey question: In what countries are the headquarters/main offices for your top five funders based? Think about your top donors from the last five years.

## Why this survey?

The WASH Sustainability Charter was published in 2011. About 100 organizations (including a few donors) endorsed it. In 2015, we wondered:

- Did it influence how WASH interventions were funded?
- Did this in turn improve the services over time?

There's not much information to make these connections. In place of evidence, we asked some WASH development organizations their perceptions. This made us curious about the role of funding mechanisms in contributing to sustainable services.

## About this survey

Improve International conducted a pilot survey in 2015 and follow up surveys in 2016 and 2017 to investigate the effect that funding methods have on the sustainability of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions in developing countries. The intent is to inform a dialog between donors and implementing organizations.

### Sample for 2017 survey

Responses were considered for inclusion in this sample if they were from an individual representing an organization that was:

- A direct implementer (the organization directly conducts water, sanitation, or hygiene interventions);
- A pass-through organization (the organization raises funds and makes grants to implementing organizations); or
- A hybrid (the organization raises funds, directly conducts water, sanitation, and/or hygiene interventions and also makes grants to other implementing organizations)

## Sample Demographics

*We kept all respondents anonymous. But thanks so much to all of you – you know who you are!*

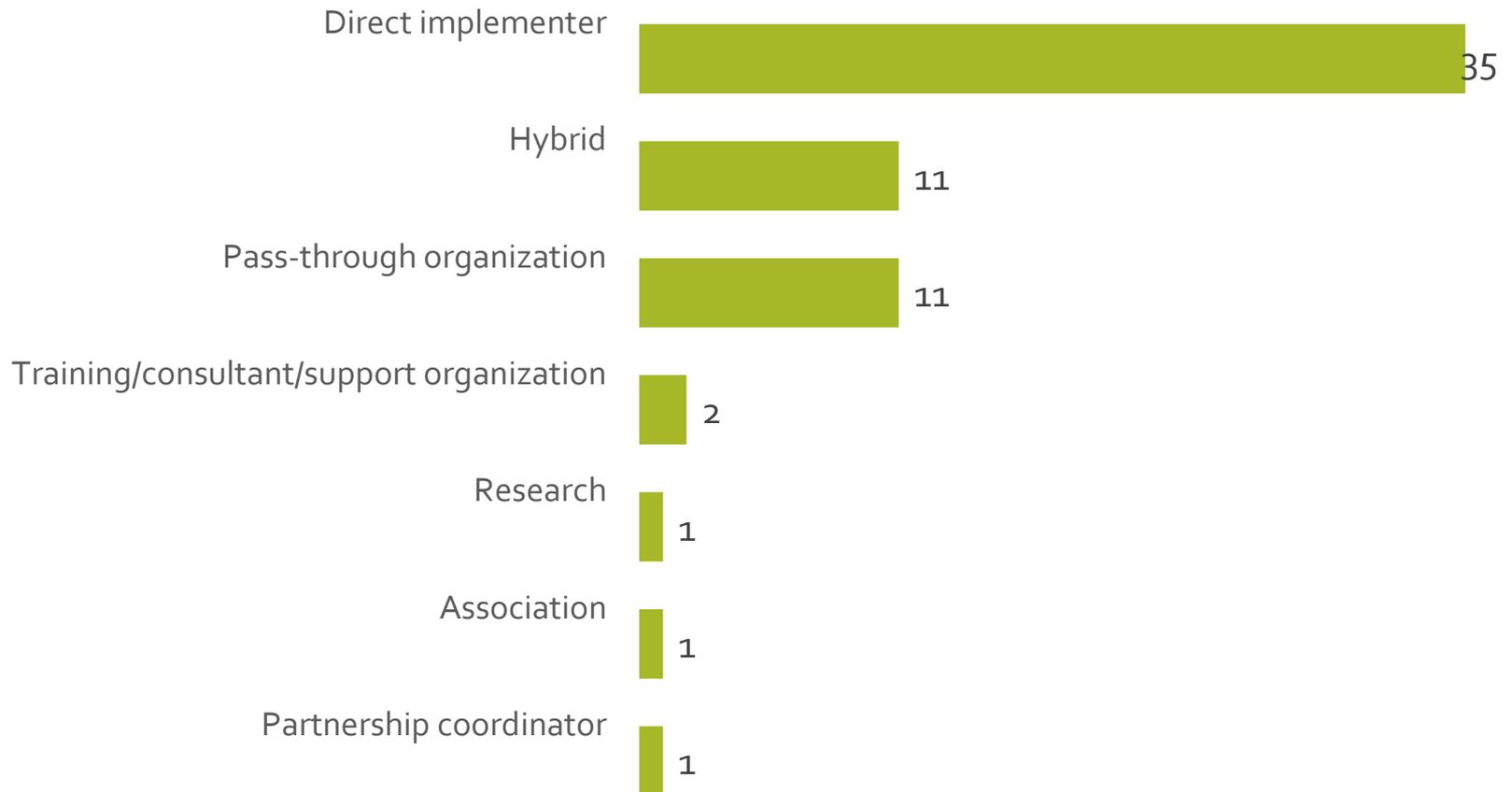
**62** responses were received

Representing **59** unique organizations

From **28** different countries

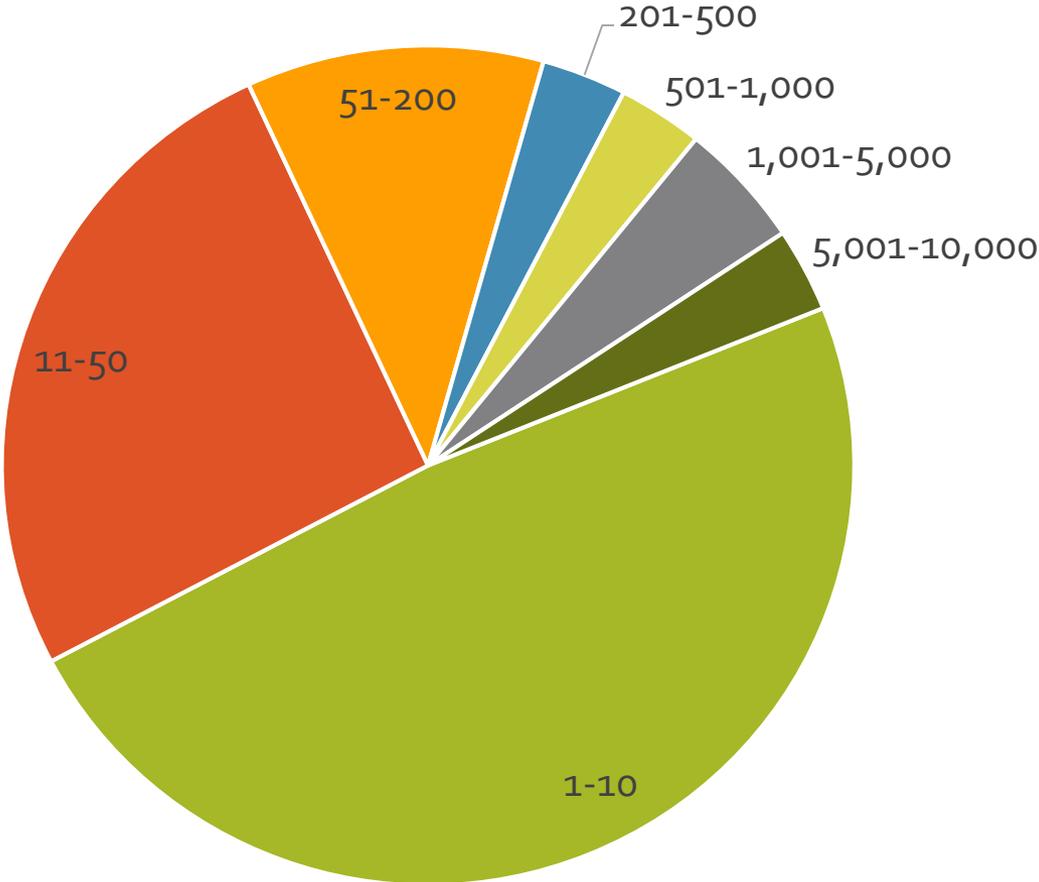
The top five countries represented were USA (21%), UK (8%), Germany (6%), India (6%), and Kenya (4%).

# Types of Responding Organizations



\*Direct implementer: the organization directly conducts water, sanitation, or hygiene interventions; pass-through organization: the organization raises funds and makes grants to implementing organizations; or hybrid: the organization raises funds, directly conducts water, sanitation, and/or hygiene interventions and also makes grants to other implementing organizations.

# Number of employees in responding organizations



# Income of responding organizations



## About us



Improve International is a not-for-profit research and consulting firm that seeks to amplify the impact of water and sanitation interventions. We believe that people deserve to have high quality water and sanitation services, for life, and for generations. We identify objectively what's working well over time and what's not (and why).

Improve International plays a unique role in the sector. We don't do water projects, we don't fund water projects, we just try to make them last forever. With a focus on accountability, learning, and innovation, we help improve the work and coordination of international development organizations and donors. Learn more at [improveinternational.org](https://improveinternational.org)