FLUSH

Issues we ALL know about in WASH that have become crutch complaints for the sector (and maybe don't need to single out?):

- There's a focus on hardware technology that isn't going to work for behavior change over the long run
- Short-term projects are not sustainable
- Funding in the sector sucks and is in limited supply
- The sector MUST do a better job including communities in conversations before projects start
- The sector hasn't standardized much, which is infuriating

Systems Change Not Addressing Equity: We talk about systems change issues in the sector, but so far we've only really talked about it at the ground level, and haven't talked about how systems change is about the whole picture, including the institutions and leaderships of our sector making decisions and moving the money. WASH as a sector tends to be run by older white males (typically engineers), which is not representative of the people and communities where we work, especially when we're thinking about pushing for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable programs. There's been a good RWSN conversation recently about some of the challenges.

There are many reasons why there isn't a lot of diversity at the leadership and team management level – local staff from programmatic countries aren't paid enough to be incentivized to stick around in the sector and become a leader. This has been something noted in frustration recently when Kim was working within Kenya – there was high turnover in the Kenyan teammates because they weren't paid enough or given enough autonomy to make them feel it was worth staying in the sector. Similarly, women are often struggling to move forward in the sector and face discrimination – for example, someone had challenges getting some jobs in the sector because organizations in other countries outside of the US have asked her about whether she have intentions of having a child anytime soon, leaving her to wonder if being a woman of child-bearing age has reduced the strength of her career experience and skillsets.

No Managers to Lead: Those in the sector are promoted based on technical background and experience, typically not on their management abilities. It's assumed that if you're good at technical advising for projects on sanitation marketing, then you can run a handful of people's jobs. Unfortunately, that means that there are no good managers in the sector leading teams. This means some people leave the sector because they've had one too many bad bosses in the sector and they want to work for better bosses elsewhere, or that some people get stuck in mid-level roles because the managers don't know what to do with them or expand their capacity, so they get pigeon-holed and unable to find opportunities for growth…ultimately leaving. Many WASH orgs use being small as an excuse to not better manage their people. The example used was a water NYC-based NGO not wanting to comply with the state law on having a breastfeeding room available in their new office when she was responsible for the move, meaning that two male bosses were telling me, a woman, that her biological needs and potential desires

for working while having children were not important or worth acknowledging to them. Another sign of equity issues.

Academic Presence Skews All: Is our professional success metric in WASH the number of academic publications? Many focus on publishing articles in the sector, which is problematic because (1) many people from LMICs cannot afford to generate OR access these knowledge products, (2) it emphasizes Western academic institutions, which are privileged places to get education even though LMICs have good institutions but are barely acknowledged, and (3) no one who is trying to implement/practice on the ground have the time, patience, bandwidth, or resources to read and follow. Similarly, the academic presence can be problematic for progress and growth – there is emphasis on getting a PhD in the sector, but then who is left to implement and innovate on the ground? Many of the academic institutions have plenty of female students, but where do those female students go once they get their PhDs? Many don't stay in the sector because of money or they can't find roles in the sector roles easily.

Berta M. believes one of the main factors for the current prevalence of academia in the WASH sector is the funding mechanisms available. There is a lot of funding available for research and implementation projects that require university participation and academic performance is mainly measured by publication outputs and fundraising ability through grants. She thinks this is especially true in the sanitation sector. There are 2 types of academics in WASH, those that have spent a significant amount of time working 'in the field' and act mainly as consultants/fundraisers for projects but also contribute to training the next generation of WASH leaders. Then there are the institutions that are more focused on funding and publications and also often more technology or science-focused. Those teams are most often made up of (white) scientists or engineers with little or no field experience and are interested in the technology side of things rather than understanding the local contexts and challenges and often end up implementing inappropriate solutions. From her experience, people are encouraged to remain in academia and enter the postdoc-after-postdoc route and no other real alternatives. She also added that doing a PhD was one of the only means she found of entering the sector without having prior experience and getting paid in the process (in the UK PhDs are funded, this isn't always the case in the US). Colonialism is definitely very relevant and prevalent in academia, especially in terms of funding mechanisms and partnerships between Western and universities in LMICs that are usually not done on an equal footing and LMICs universities on their own can't really attract funding.

No Objective Communications Platform: SuSanA is really our only current means of having dialogues in and progress in the sector but it's a quagmire. It's difficult to navigate, and is centered around an antiquated online forum platform that no one uses other than some GIZ and SEI guys who are obligated to look there because they run it, and Indian engineers desperate for guidance and help from a sector who is not keen to share with them information to help their work. And the conversations on SuSanA are often steered by a particular moderator, who some feel like she harasses good posters to drive more conversations that may not be worthwhile for the sector to address. Example: Some of us co-wrote a blog post about SWM+FSM on IRC WASH blog, she emailed her to try to get her to help edit the Wikipedia page on sanitation…but who would read that Wikipedia page that matters, anyway? The sanitation definition many use is the JMP, so why would it matter what Wikipedia – which isn't a trusted source to cite – says? The only real other options the sector has is Devex and IRCWASH blog, which the latter is bound to have its own agenda on articles they post to some extent. The sector needs its own

objective communications platform – like CityLab – where people can submit short, digestible content for someone to lightly and objectively review for quality and relevance (maybe through a small fee-for-service model on a sliding scale). Then, people from everywhere could have somewhere to share ideas and stories with the sector in a productive, timely way. BMGF is likely prime to support an initiative like this.

Colonialism & COVID-19: After COVID-19, it's clear that the current WASH sector (and international development) cannot go the way they have in the past – primarily, the colonialism mentality of having white managers on the ground doesn't work anymore. If the sector wants to look at sustainable, successful projects, leaders of organizations and managers should not be able to feel like they can leave the program country because they call somewhere else home. If founders and managers are leaving African countries or LMICs during COVID-19 because they want to "be home", and leave their teams in the program country to fend for themselves and be forced to be managed at odd times of the day because their white boss lives somewhere else now, how can a program or business even be considered viable at that point? We need to have less white people running programs in other countries and forcing program country staff to fit into our cultural molds. No White Saviors does a good job advocating for local staff for sustainable programs.

Successions and Professionalizing: If we want to build a better WASH sector, we need to professionalize it. Part of professionalizing the sector will need to include professionalizing our teams in LMICs so that they don't need a bunch of white bosses and consultants to do their work. We talk about professionalizing utilities all of the time, and now we need to think about how informal the sector is at large because of how we manage our people and programs. Professionalization means all WASH teams should be professionalized, and provided with the write structures and capacities to work well enough so they don't need colonist-minded professionals to come in anymore. Succession plans will be an important thing for the sector to start thinking about now, too, as many of the sector leaders (aka - old white men) are gearing up to retire in the near future (please goddess let this be true). Who will be succeeding the leaders of our sector like Patrick Moriarty, Jamie Bartram, Louis Boorstin, etc. etc.? And what will their successors look like? They shouldn't promote people that look just like them – that defeats the purpose of trying to create systems change in the sector and improve the sector so it works better in the future.

Silos in WASH: Berta pointed out that there is a lack of integration between the different parts of WASH - water, sanitation and hygiene are rarely actually discussed or implemented together or funded together for that matter. Maybe we're just not one sector after all and we need to acknowledge that once and for all or create more links between the different parts of the sector. But that probably can't be considered a new challenge by now.