



# Failing better in the WASH sector: Acknowledging the Elephant in the WASH Room

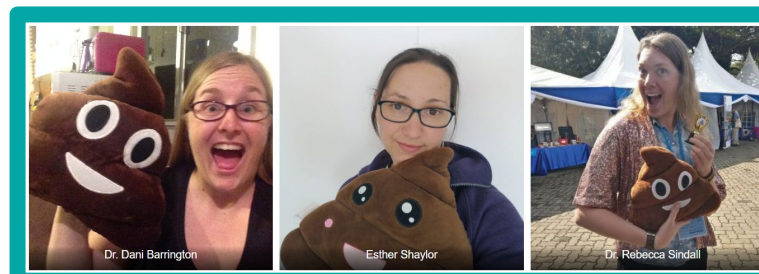
Dani Barrington, Rebecca Sindall, Esther Shaylor

The University of Western Australia

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**RESEARCH BRIEF:**

## AMPLIFYING LOCAL VOICES TO REDUCE FAILURE IN THE WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SECTOR

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

There needs to be a culture shift towards greater responsibility, and particularly shared accountability, for water, sanitation and hygiene WASH failures and challenges. Participants made three suggestions:

1. **Create cross-organisational platforms for sharing** – In-person organised forums for discussion of challenges and failures between organisations in a similar geographical area or with a similar project focus;
2. **Improve coordination between organisations** – by improving communication between partner organisations, greater transparency would increase the sense of shared responsibility for project outcomes, and hence increase the likelihood of failures being discussed;
3. **Change the role of the donor** – donors have a large influence on how projects are planned and executed and should encourage flexibility in project planning to allow change in the face of failure, and encourage openness through mandating the reporting of challenges and failures.

**BACKGROUND:**

WASH interventions regularly fail. Sometimes this means that entire programmes do not achieve their stated aims, sometimes these failures are setbacks which can be rectified with sufficient reflection and action.

This research aimed to develop an evidence base of how and why field-based WASH professionals in four sub-Saharan African countries believe failures occur, their experiences when sharing and discussing them within their organisations, and how they believe a culture conducive to publicly sharing and learning from failures could be nurtured.

**RESEARCH APPROACH:**

108 field-based WASH professionals from Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe were interviewed. Individuals were recruited through purposive sampling and represented local private, public, non-governmental, and academic stakeholders in WASH.

Required approvals to conduct the research were granted by University of Leeds and local human research ethics committees.




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the sanitation learning hub

## Learning from and preventing failure in WASH

Rebecca C. Sindall (independent consultant) and Dani J. Barrington (The University of Western Australia), with Esther Shaylor (UNICEF)



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EDITORIAL

## Fail Fast, Fail Forward, Fail Openly: The Need to Share Failures in Development

Rebecca C. Sindall<sup>1</sup>, Dani J. Barrington<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pollution Research Group, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa  
<sup>2</sup> School of Population and Global Health, The University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

Correspondence: Dr Rebecca Sindall, Operations Manager, Pollution Research Group, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa  
Email: [sindall@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:sindall@ukzn.ac.za)

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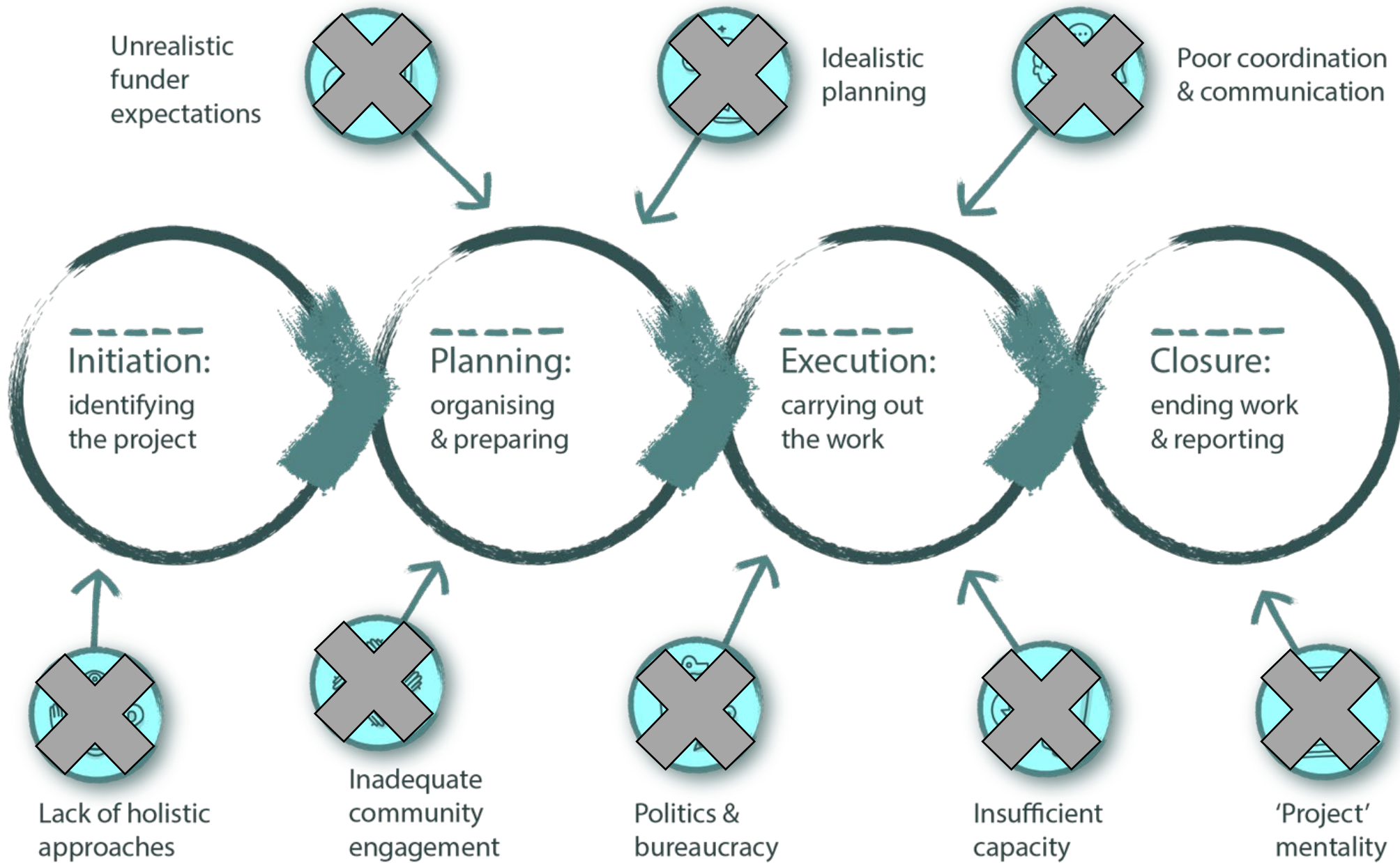
Let's learn from one another's menstrual health and hygiene programme/policy/practice failures!

16<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> February

Shit happens.  
@FSM\_Fail



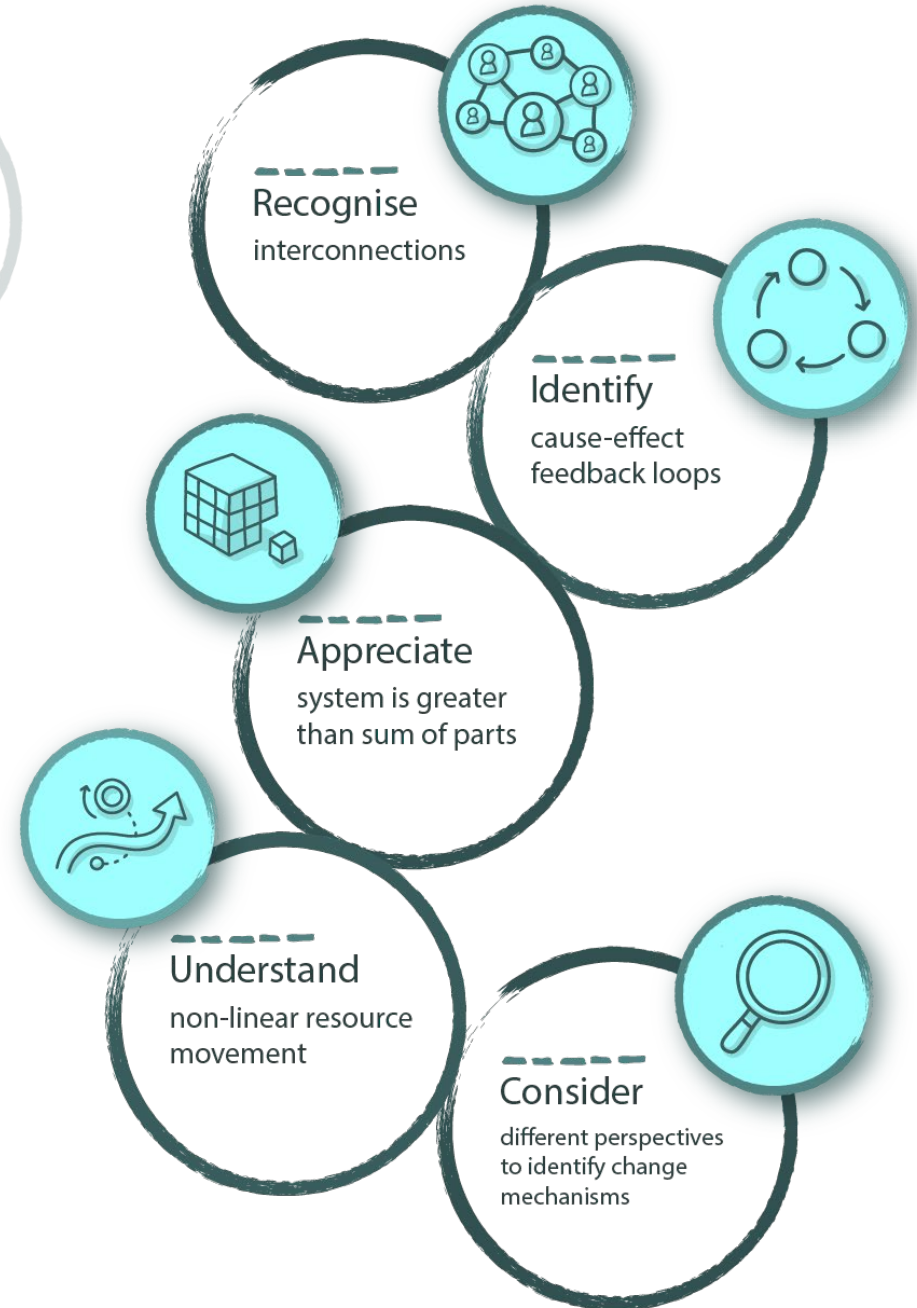








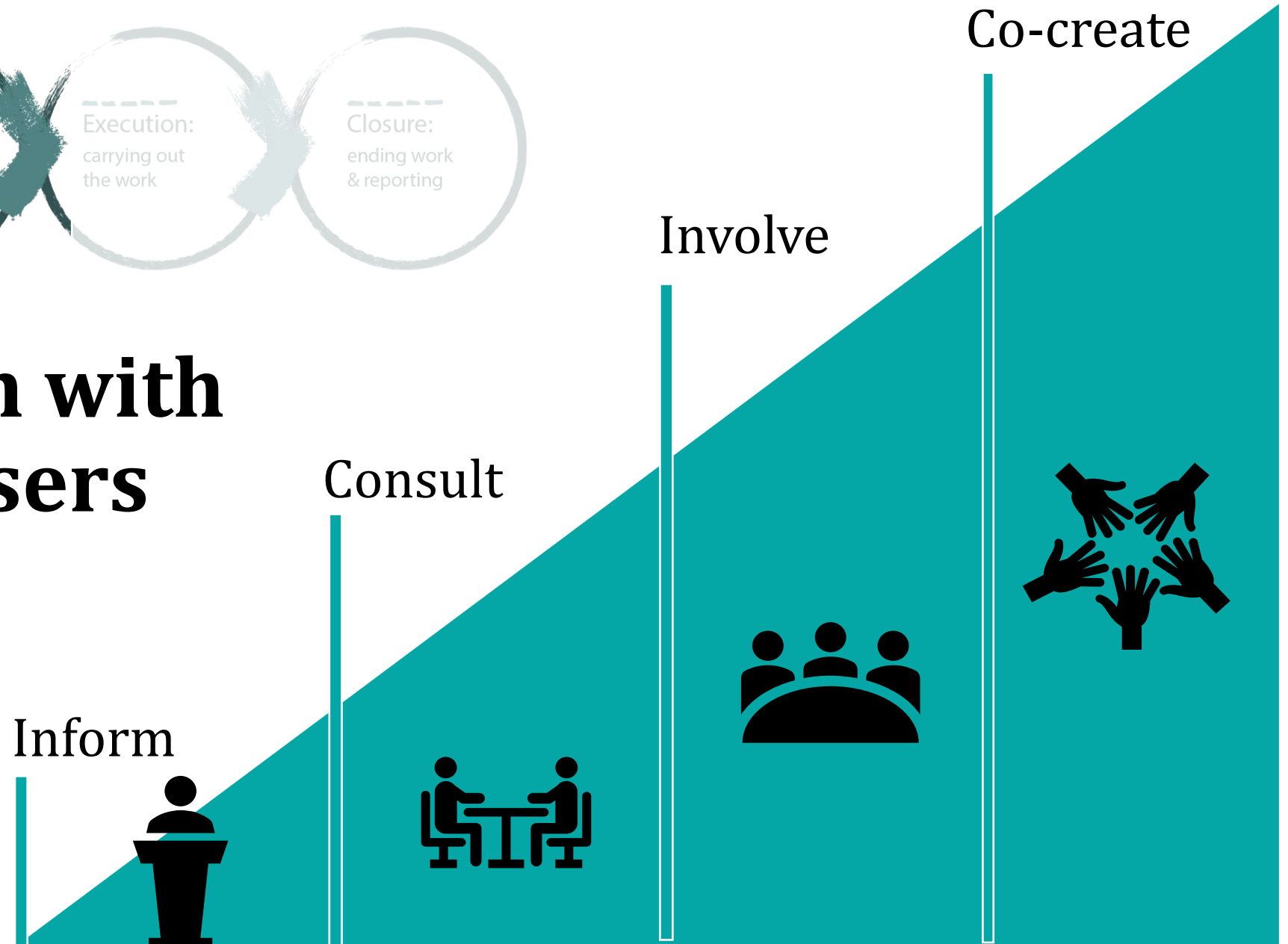
# 1. Take a Systems Approach





## 2. Co-design with Intended Users

*“Nothing for the people without the people”*





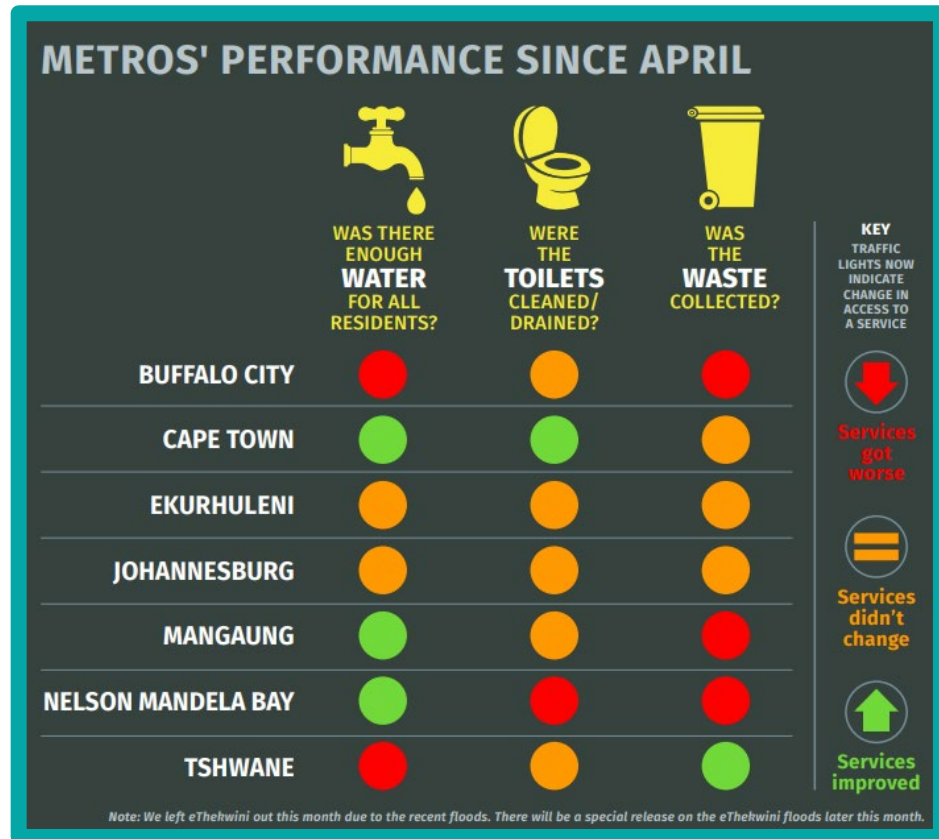
### **3. Allow and encourage flexibility to experiment**







# 4. Be Transparent & Accountable



Admit Failures  
+  
Put Things Right  
=  
Build Trust

# 5. Address failure in the funding process

- Be clear about how you allocate funds
- Provide funding for co-design from the start
- Provide flexibility so grantees can respond to failures



- Demonstrate value of honest discussions
- What IS sustainability exactly?!

# Top tips for sharing and learning

1. Power matters – take time to build trust
2. Language matters – think about what words to use
3. Sensitive conversations are easier in person
4. Provide incentives to share
5. Integrate learning within your working processes



# Embedding learning into WASH culture

## The Nakuru Accord:

- Promote a culture of sharing and learning
- Be fiercely transparent
- Actively seek feedback
- Share experiences when things go wrong

*345 signatories*



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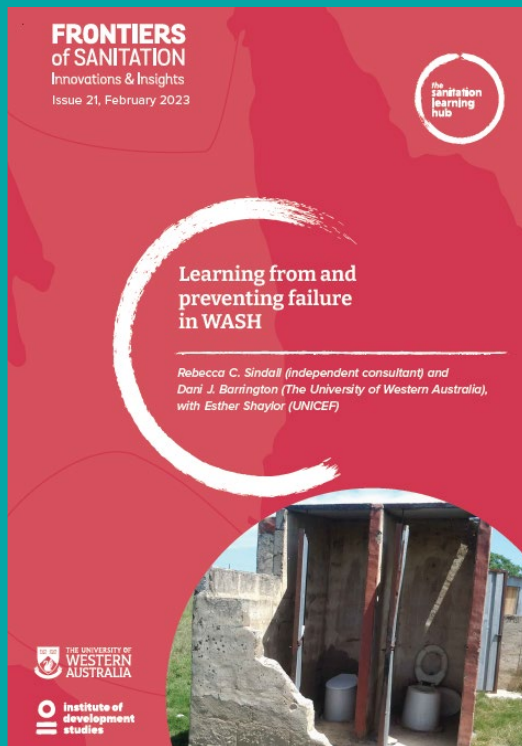
*Contact me directly:*

[dani.barrington@uwa.edu.au](mailto:dani.barrington@uwa.edu.au)



*Check out our website:*

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