



**IMPROVE**  
INTERNATIONAL

**DO WASH DONORS INFLUENCE  
SUSTAINABILITY?  
RESULTS FROM A 2016 SURVEY**

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March 2017

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Most respondents believe the ways donors fund influence sustainability of water, sanitation and hygiene interventions.

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

**But how do they know? →**

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Monitoring and/or evaluation after programs was reported by 59% of respondents as underfunded.

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Ideally, we could track the results of different types of grants over time. But often, unrestricted and restricted funds are blended to cover the full cost of a program.

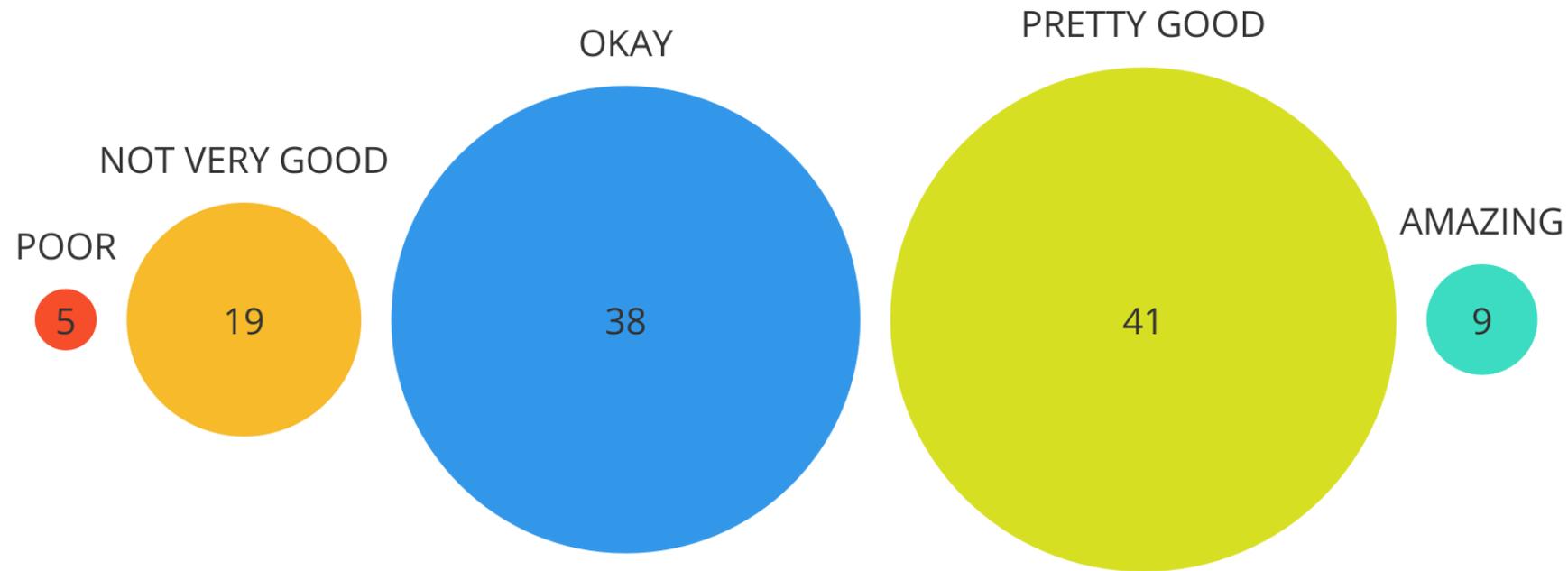
## Key Takeaways 2016 Survey

# 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?

# 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?

# Donors are less likely to request information on institutional, environmental, social and leadership issues in proposals

Donors ask us to address this in proposals	% of Respondents			
	All	Some	Few	None
Financial	63	31	17	1
Institutional / governance	40	42	29	1
Environmental	31	48	26	6
Social / behavioral	31	50	25	5
Technical	59	41	11	0
Local leadership	21	56	28	6

Survey question: Which of these items do donors ask you to address in proposals? (Traffic light shading by author)

# Common restrictions for WASH donations

72%



Project time frame

56%



No/limited funding for "overhead" costs

56%



Donor wants funds to support water, sanitation, hygiene in specific community

52%



Matching donation requirements

30%



Cost per person

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

# Generally under-funded activities

59%



Monitoring and/or evaluation after program

49%



Knowledge management and learning

58%



Research

47%



Professional development of local government or partner organizations

55%



Professional development of your organization's staff

45%



Resolution of problems identified after the project

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

# Generally under-funded activities (continued)

43%



Overhead

38%



Software (training, community engagement, government engagement, etc.)

42%



Systems change

29%



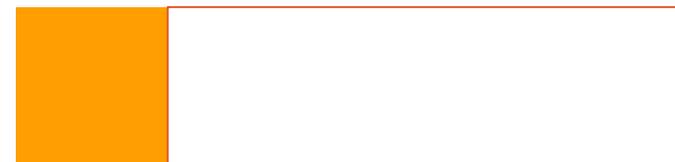
Monitoring and/or evaluation during program

38%



Adaptation and innovation

22%



Drinking water supply and basic sanitation hardware

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

Most respondents replied that the following donor restrictions seriously or somewhat hindered sustainability of water and sanitation services: lack of funding for long-term monitoring (96%), limited funding for overhead (95%), limited time frame (89%), and an arbitrary cost per person or push for lowest cost per person (89%).

Most underfunded activities in descending order were: Monitoring and/or evaluation after program (63%), knowledge management and learning (57%), resolution of problems identified after the project (57%), software (training, community engagement, government engagement, etc.) (51%), research (49%), and overhead (46%).

Analysis of data from 40 qualified respondents clearly reveals a lack of alignment between the needs of implementing organizations and the contributions of donors.

# Key Takeaways 2015 Survey

# About the donors described in this survey

From 43 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	168
UK	51
Netherlands	29
Canada	20
Switzerland	20
Australia	13

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

We conducted a pilot survey in 2015 and a follow up survey in 2016 to investigate the effect that grants and donations have on the sustainability of water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions in developing countries. We sought to understand parallels between funding expectations and the WASH Sustainability Charter, a document endorsed by more than 100 organizations in 2011. The intent is to bring about understanding between donors and implementing organizations, furthering the conversation about sustainable WASH services.

## Sample for 2016 survey

112 qualified responses. 25 were disqualified because they had an incomplete survey or said none of their investments were WASH-related.

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)

In this survey, unlike the 2015 survey, we also included responses from organizations that have not received funds from US-based donors in the past 5 years.

# Sample Demographics

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

**137** total responses were  
received

Representing **102** unique  
organizations

From **29** different countries

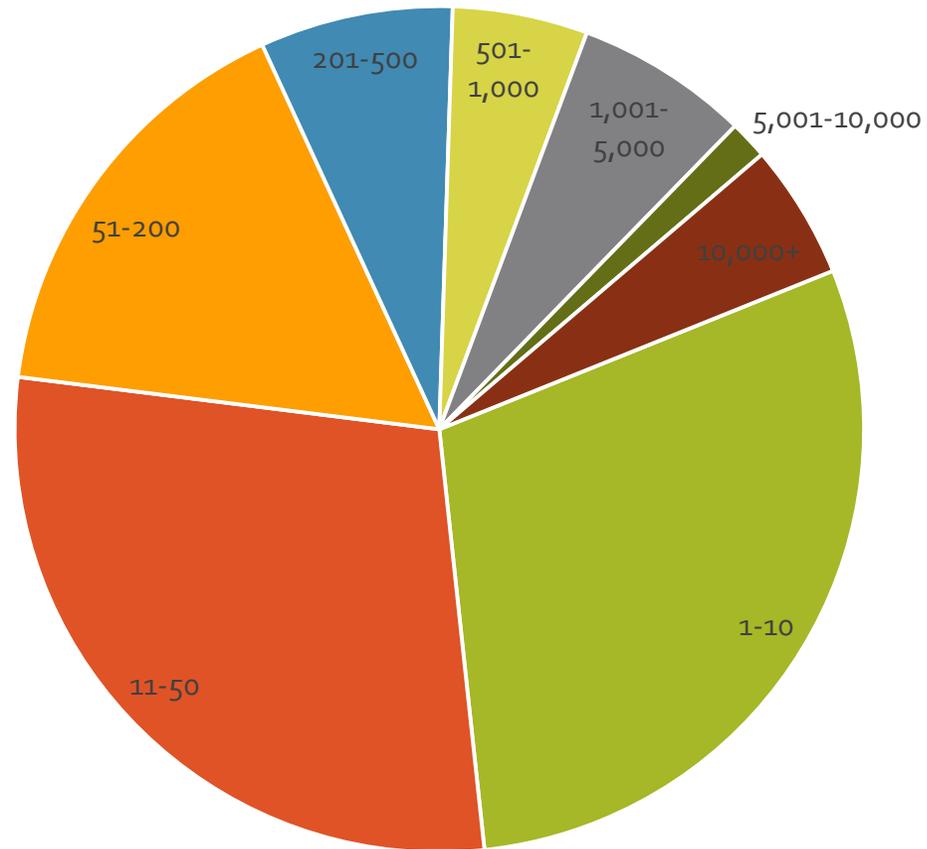
The top five countries  
represented were USA (44%),  
Netherlands (10%), UK (7%),  
Kenya (4%), Uganda (4%).

## 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



# About Improve International



**I M P R O V E**  
INTERNATIONAL

Improve International is a not-for-profit research and consulting firm that seeks to improve the responses to the water and sanitation crises. 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](http://improveinternational.org)