Evaluating the effectiveness of WASH training

Objectives

The objective of this project was to design an evaluative framework to assist capacity builders in the water and sanitation sector to capture and interpret the results of their education and training activities, in order to assist them to understand how they can maximize their positive impacts.

Introduction

A key constraint to planning and implementing effective and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services is the “lack of capacity at the local level”, especially for peri-urban and rural populations (WHO, 2010). There are critical shortages in technically qualified staff, including engineering and social development professionals (IWA, 2013). Recognizing this gap, organizations are offering technical and management training. However, questions remain:

- How effective are these activities?
- Have they led to improved access to clean water and sanitation, and to improved health and well-being?
- Have the knowledge and skills of governments and NGOs actually increased?

There is some evidence that governments and NGOs aren’t getting the skills needed (IWA, 2011). Unless results are measured effectively, one cannot evaluate outcomes and improve impact, but a review of 104 WASH capacity builders found that only 1/3 measured their results (Cranfield University, 2012). Even then, the evaluation methods used often only described outputs (e.g. # of people trained).

Methodology

Twenty-two different evaluation methods were reviewed. Of these, “Kirkpatrick’s 4 levels of learning” was selected and customized. An interview protocol was developed, and ethics approval acquired. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Peru and Nepal with participants from CAWST training and consulting activities 5 years earlier. Respondents were staff from local and international NGOs, community health promoters, staff from community groups, and local entrepreneurs. All interviews were recorded with interviewee permission. The interviews were transcribed and responses were analyzed to detect common themes.

Kirkpatrick’s 4 levels of learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did participants respond to the training?</td>
<td>How have the participants’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes changed?</td>
<td>How has the participant’s behaviour changed?</td>
<td>How have organizational outcomes changed?</td>
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Results: Evaluation framework

The key assumption underlying this tool is that the capacity-building organization wants to improve and is willing to iterate and change their methods and materials based on feedback from the process.

Results: Case studies

**Peru**

CAWST has been working in Peru since 2005, with 12 consulting visits and 40 workshops between 2005-2013.

- 12 interviews (May 2013)
- Summary of findings:
  - Majority reacted positively to training and consulting support
  - Consulting support visits and feedback irregular or not frequent enough
  - Perception that CAWST could reach more people by making more use of web technology
  - Institutional arrangements between CAWST and clients are sometimes confusing
  - Clients have challenges in communicating with donors and community members
  - CAWST should target WASH training to support other sectors (e.g. nutrition)

**Nepal**

CAWST has been working in Nepal since 2004, with >30 consulting visits and >50 workshops between 2004-2013.

- 18 interviews (September 2013)
- Summary of findings:
  - Majority reacted positively to training and consulting support
  - Consulting support visits and feedback irregular or not frequent enough
  - Technology transfer can be improved through CAWST clients collaborating more locally
  - Clients would like assistance with methods of monitoring and evaluation
  - Knowledge transfer in technical skills was rated very highly, but challenges were reported in organizational capacity, business management, and human resources

Reflections

1. We can control how the workshop or consulting support is delivered, but behaviour and results at community level are influenced by many factors.
2. In almost all cases, participants could identify some action they took after taking the workshop, e.g.:
   - talked to supervisors about the knowledge learned
   - wrote funding proposals to implement HWTS
   - started community clean up, dug rubbish pits, etc.
3. Impacts on health, economics, and gender equity were mentioned by some respondents.
4. In-depth interviews provided plenty of valuable qualitative information, stories, and testimonials, which can’t be obtained from a survey. This interview process significantly enhanced relationships with clients.
5. Steps were taken to reduce subjectivity in the process, but we can’t rule out reporting bias. Interviews should be paired with more quantitative methods.

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Cranfield University. 2012. A global review of capacity building organizations in water and sanitation for developing countries. University of Cranfield: UK.


