



# Sensemaking in Sustainable Water Fund Initiatives

Story based research of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects in Ghana and Kenya

**The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) initiated a ‘sensemaking’ pilot to learn how to use stories to deepen their understanding of the impact of their WASH projects. With the help of Sprockler -a story based research method- we collected experiences and data of two projects, in Kenya and in Ghana. This document provides a summary of the findings and an introduction to the interactive online Sprockler report.<sup>1</sup>**

In our increasingly complex world, evidence based, quantitative research has severe limitations. Actors and factors that are mutually intertwined and constantly on the move, cannot be captured in numbers alone. New approaches and methods are needed to better understand the complex settings in which the projects funded by the Sustainable Water Fund operate.

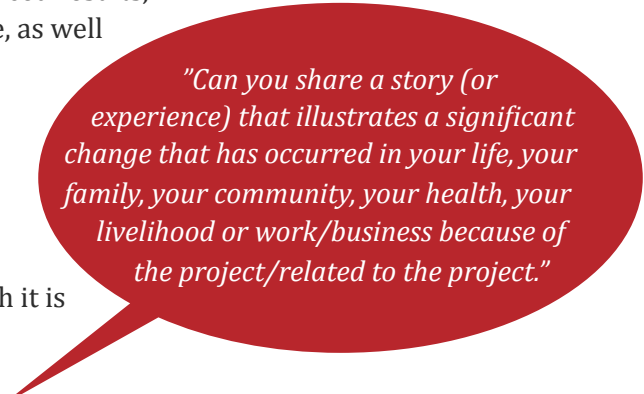
Narrative research collects qualitative data (stories) through (peer-to-peer) interviews via a mobile app or online link and turns these into quantitative insights (patterns) (real time collection into Sprockler), while maintaining access to the wealth and nuances of the stories themselves. This participatory approach involves people as active source of inspiration, rather than as passive sources of information. Story sharing, self-signification of the stories, collective interpretation of trends, patterns and opportunities of both stories and data, provides new insights for change.

<p><b>Kenya - FDW12KE03</b> Financial Inclusion Improves Sanitation and Health (FINISH).</p> <p>Partners: Waste (Lead), AMREF Flying Doctors, Actium, Sidian Bank, Family Bank, Imarika, Take a Stake Fund, Ministry of Health Kenya, and the United Nations University.</p>	<p><b>Ghana - FDW12GH06</b> SMARTERWASH Mobile Monitoring of Rural Water and Sanitation Services that Last.</p> <p>Partners: IRC (Lead), Akvo, Skyfox &amp; Water for the People.</p>
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It is therefore that RVO has chosen to pilot the Sprockler method, to potentially work as a add-on to conventional M&E. We have found it can deliver more nuanced results, makes minority opinions visible, is rapid and cost-effective, as well as responsible being able to convert qualitative data to quantitative indicators.

## Can you share a story...

In total 71 respondents shared a story and reflections on their story; 19 from Ghana and 52 from Kenya. Even though it is recommended to have a minimum of 50 respondents per



<sup>1</sup> Link to full report online: <https://visualizer.sprockler.com/nl/open/WASH>

stakeholder group to conclude more defining patterns, initial results are however are still visible and can be read below, as well as observed in the Sprockler report.

All respondents are involved in a WASH project, but come from very different backgrounds, including end users and beneficiaries, service providers and private sector, (local) government, NGOs and institutes. In the case of Ghana most of the respondents have indicated to belong to the local government stakeholder group.

## Story of stories

A great majority of the respondents were very positive about the initiatives in both countries. The bubble plot on the right illustrates that the change in their story related to the intervention induced significant changes on their lives. The stories are all (except one from Ghana) very positive. The feeling of the story is mostly positive, however, as illustrated in the 'feeling of the story' graph below some respondents from Ghana also indicated their story to be sad, frustrated and concerning. What follows is a more detailed interpretation of the stories by project location.

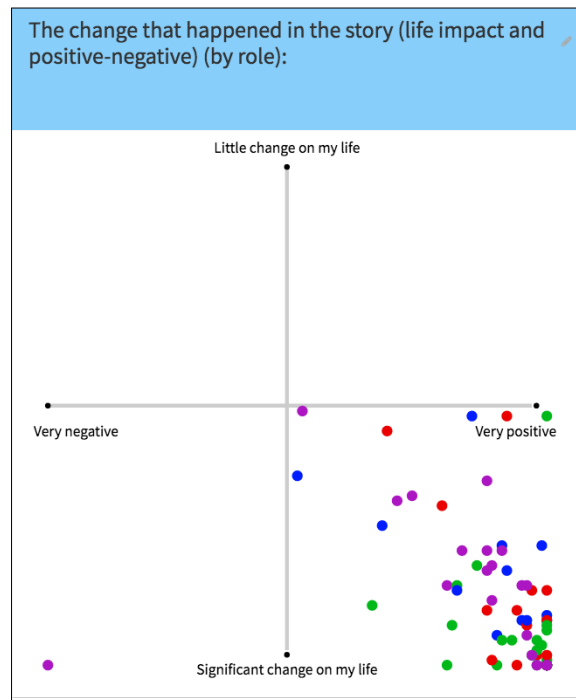
### Kenya

**Social status** - Beneficiaries in Kenya often emphasise the upgraded latrine facility to be 'beautiful, easy to clean and free of smell and flies'. There is a sense of pride to own such a modern latrine in one's village.

**Community dynamics** - There is a positive community-dynamic happening; villagers encourage each other (families, neighbours) to also buy a latrine, because of its demonstrable positive effects on health, social status, household economics.

**Health benefits** - All stakeholders mention the (drastic) reduction in diarrheal diseases. This in turn contributes to savings in medical costs and less congestion in health facilities.

**Affordability** for low-income households is perceived to be good, as well as accessibility of services for everyone. Respondents also see a positive effect for the environment.



Most respondents indicate the change in their story to be very positive, with significant changes on people's lives.

Green = private sector/supplier  
 Purple = local authority/government  
 Blue = NGO/institution  
 Red = consumer/project beneficiary/end users



Orange = Kenya | Blue = Ghana

*“Sanitation entrepreneurship has transformed the entire face of the young population through creation of job opportunities in Teso South - Busia County.” - respondent from Kenya*

**Jobs & income** - The initiative also has a positive effect on job creation. By training youth, job opportunities have been created and at the same time undesired behaviour (violence, drug-use) is mentioned to be mitigated. Some artisans indicate they have expanded their business, from housing construction to building latrines and having clients from outside the village. Hardware store owners say business has grown, due to increased demand in materials for latrine construction. This in turn has positive effects on household incomes, leading to socio-economic growth, such as putting children to college, starting family businesses.

**Loan experience** - The relation and experience with loan schemes led to new



Anna at her improved latrine in Kenya.

initiatives, such as taking out a loan to start a cereal business or house construction.

**Training** - Many respondents are happy about the particular training they received, contributing to individual skill and knowledge development on health and sanitation marketing. Technical installation support is valuable as it ensures durability (i.e. prevents collapsing).

**Awareness** - There seems to be a increased awareness among local authorities on the need of improved latrines.



Indicative overview of outcomes from the Kenyan stories. For full view please visit [here](#).

**Construction** - The bricks used for the construction of latrines have proven to be sustainable and less costly, therefore, some people use these bricks for constructing houses as well.

## Ghana

In Ghana respondents are positive, but also critical.

**Empowerment** - Mobile phones allow for increased access to information, like being able to look up fair prices for spare parts.

**New possibilities** - Using digital systems has created a sense of excitement with the users. Coverage is yet a pre-condition for success.

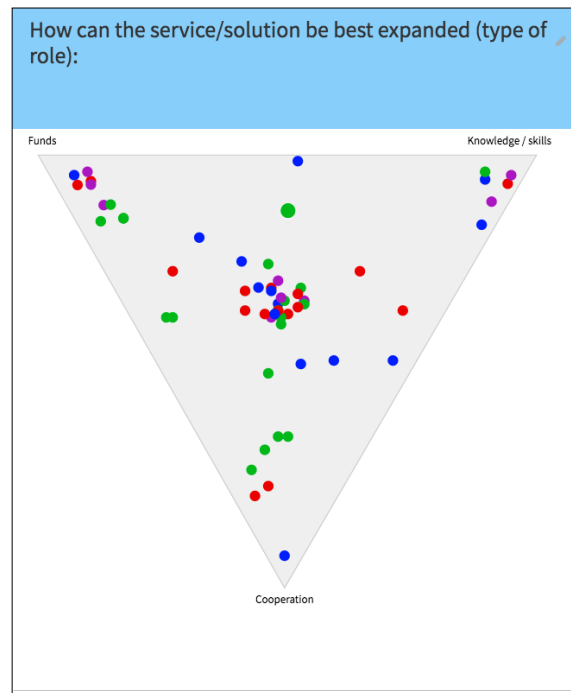
**Capacity building** - The mobile monitoring revealed that 30-40% of the facilities were not functioning and that those functioning didn't provide the basic services. The information has been used to capacitate those who manage the facilities.

**Data for decision making** - Monitoring is also changing the way how data is viewed (more accessibility and reliability) and on the basis of factual reporting, major decisions and strategic planning were influenced. However, the surveying questions set the frame for response data; relevant information outside this frame is possibly missed. The reporting of such unforeseen information needs to be catered for.

**Ownership** - Many stories implicate that the early involvement of stakeholders is crucial. Not in a consultative process, but an active participatory way, so that ownership is ensured and unforeseen details can emerge at early stages. This was not always done well enough.

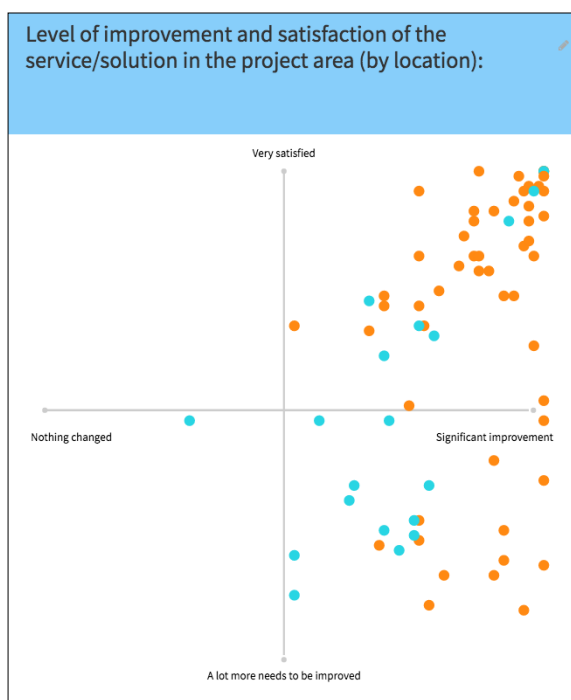
*“My involvement in the SmarterWash project provided me with the insight that improving monitoring is not only about ICT, but much more about improving processes, mechanisms and institutional and financial systems for monitoring and for acting on the data.”*

- NGO respondent from Ghana



*Most respondents opt for a balanced approach - funding, knowledge/skills and cooperation to be beneficial for expansion (central triple area).*

*Others choose singular options.*



*Great majority has seen significant improvements, but many see a need to do much more. In comparison, respondents from Ghana (blue) more so than from Kenya (orange).*

**Institutional embedding** - Even with great monitoring tools it all depends on the institutional context what is done with the new insights. Also, processes, systems need to be addressed before or while ICT comes in.

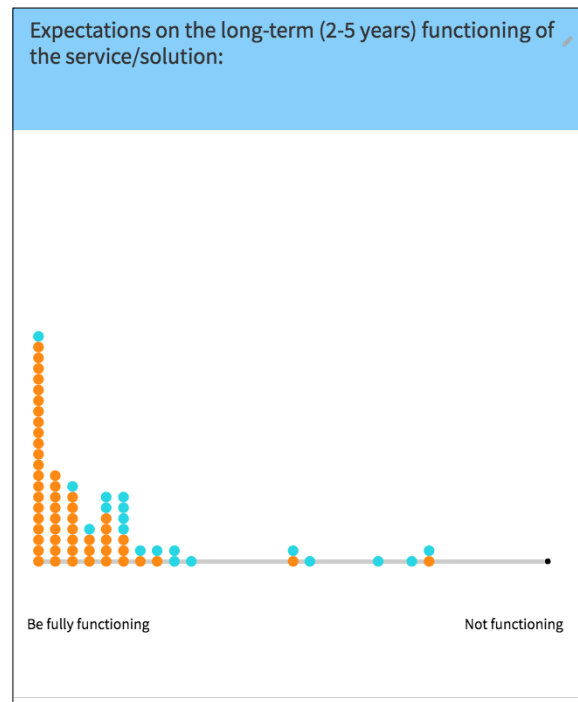
## Overall trends

The main theme's that are referred in the stories are: sanitation; hygiene; and infrastructure. These were mostly from Kenyan respondents. Ghanaian respondents linked the following theme's to their story: drinking water, water supply, information/data and technology. About half of the respondents is fully satisfied with the current services/solutions (predominantly Kenyans). However, as the bubble plot on the right indicates (on page 4), the other half sees improvement but indicates that a lot more still needs to be done (from Ghana and Kenya), especially on wider knowledge/skills development, awareness building and the general scaling-up based on obtained successes.

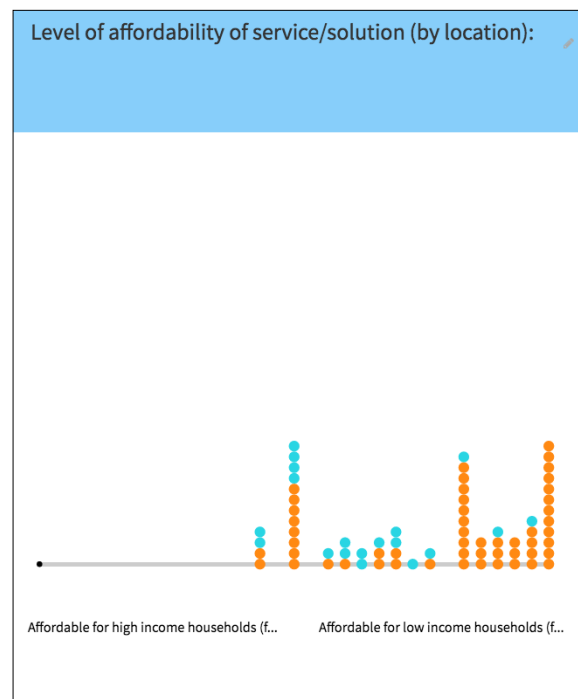
The majority of respondents think the service will be fully functioning in the future. There are a few respondents that are less convinced (five from Ghana, two from Kenya) as can be seen from the graph on the right. The stories behind the data from the Ghana project tell us that the main concern of people is that there is still much to be developed to make the system function (infrastructure, technology, services) for everything to works as intended. Nevertheless, early positive effects are noted, hence the moderate optimism among a number of respondents.

While many respondents indicate that a balance between cooperation, funding and knowledge/skills is the way forward, some believe that solution resides mainly with one of these three (see tripole on page 4).

Overall, most respondents indicate the service to be affordable for low-income families (see 'level of affordability' graph on the right below). However, some Ghanaian respondents leaned slightly towards affordability for higher-income families.



*Expectations on the long term: majority sees the service fully functioning, while a few do not (mostly blue from Ghana).*



*The majority of respondents indicate the service to be affordable for low income households. A few storytellers (especially from Ghana) lean towards affordability for higher income households.*



*Testing survey in East Gonja, Kenya*

## Emerging recommendations from the research

### Kenya

- Engage more youth (and women), as this has strong socio-economic effects on communities' development;
- Investigate gender roles and impact (the role of women in particular), as they are likely to be most affected by the positive health effects for example, but it is unclear how newly acquired 'space' is filled;
- Map (and facilitate) all the "side-effects" to allow growth/development to happen outside of project core activities;
- Upscale (target more communities) by boosting emerging multipliers (enthusiastic neighbours, local initiatives), especially through training;
- Capacitate and increase technical personnel and community health volunteers;
- Enhance awareness raising and sensitisation, as this clearly creates a sense of urgency

among various stakeholders about the need of improved latrines;

- Institutionalisation of the latrine concept, so that there is clear vision/policy that is guiding the initiatives.

### Ghana

- Engage key stakeholders at all project stages and ensure institutional embedding (including accountability and contracting);
- It is clear that while there is vast expertise among experts implementing projects, there is no such thing a guaranteed success. Blueprints don't work and crucial factors or actors might be overlooked;
- Ensure proper embedding of ICT systems in local contexts, so that the wow-effect is not 'leading' in the transformation, but that mechanisms, procedures, local information, decision-making, planning, and monitoring tools are addressed (not by IT specialist, but systemically).

## Acknowledgements

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