

# “Fail Forward ..” Ideas for Improving Sanitation Services



Tina Eisele, John Twesige, Shweta Lokhande, Prof Dinesh Mehta, Ronald Sakaya discussing at International Water Association’s Water and Development Congress and Exhibition

Water and sanitation provision in many African countries still faces systemic challenges around inclusion, innovation, funding, regulation, and sustainability.

However, insights shared at recent high-level meetings suggest paths forward.

## Key Action Highlights

- Decentralize and optimize on-site sanitation systems to promote inclusive access
- Bridge financing gaps with instruments like microfinance and climate funding
- Enable regulation by strengthening mechanisms and regulator-provider collaboration
- Improve efficiency and integrate user participation in decision making
- Reverse “build, neglect, rebuild” via asset management and performance incentives
- Build climate resilient infrastructure through technologies and accessible financing
- Improve efficiency and integrate user participation in decision making

1  
Optimize and integrate decentralized infrastructure to promote inclusivity

Decentralized and on-site sanitation solutions/systems have significant potential for expanding access. But most provision currently happens informally in low-income areas. Optimizing and integrating these with centralized infrastructure can promote inclusivity. Additionally, innovations in management, financing, partnerships, and technologies should suit local contexts. When such innovations reach maturity, they ought to be standardized.

2  
Seek alternative funding sources including exploring resource recovery

Financing remains a major barrier. Usual annual investments fall far short of targets. Therefore, funding needs to bridge viability gaps for providers through instruments like microfinance, bonds, and public-private partnership initiatives. Cost recovery mechanisms that account for positive public health impacts need to be part of financing strategies. Additional funds could be unlocked by positioning projects to leverage climate funding sources which have the potential to provide impetus.

3  
Regulators should collaborate as opposed to police service providers

Effective regulation enables organization and investment in and for sanitation service provision. Many countries still lack adequate legal backing and coordination mechanisms for sanitation governance. Therefore, regulators need to collaborate, rather than police, when supporting providers to expand access. To complement this, formal frameworks need adaptation for informal systems that currently serve most populations.

4  
Mainstream climate risks in policy and planning while leveraging technologies

Building climate-resilient water and sanitation infrastructure is imperative given increased climate variability. Mainstreaming climate risks in policy and planning while leveraging technologies like water quality monitoring systems will be necessary to improve resilience. Accessing international climate funds to achieve this, however, requires developing bankable projects and pooling financing locally.

5  
Integrate service users in decision-making around regulation and infrastructure development

While external investments help, households still provide most capital for water and sanitation through tariffs and out-of-pocket payments. Thus, ensuring efficiency and accountability to users is paramount in steering public resources. It is therefore important to integrate service users in decision-making around regulation and infrastructure development.

6  
Ensure systematic asset management alongside performance-linked incentives for service providers

Sustainability remains elusive as neglect leads systems to premature decay. A “build, neglect, rebuild” tendency dominates - increasing life-cycle costs and inconveniencing consumers. Systematic asset management alongside performance-linked incentives for service providers offers paths to reversing this default.



Participants at the opening ceremony

## Summary

Advancing sanitation access sustainably relies heavily on decentralizing and strengthening onsite systems. Connecting top-down governance and financing, with bottom-up stewardship and knowledge sharing is indispensable. Collaborative efforts will be essential.

“Regulators need to act as collaborators, rather than police, when supporting providers to expand access.”

## About the conference

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Eawag - Sandec was represented by Dr. George Wainaina, Ms. Marisa Boller and Eng. Ronald Sakaya.



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