

## From skepticism to success

**When I first got involved in the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW), I was skeptical. Was it not just traditional development aid packaged in new 2010's buzzwords? Back then it was a trend: getting more market dynamics in development aid would make it more sustainable and provide more value for money. Public-private partnerships would make the often weak public sector in countries in development more efficient. So too in the water sector, FDW argued.**

I am still skeptical that more private sector involvement in the water sector automatically leads to more efficiency. But FDW has convinced me that cooperation between public, private and non-profit actors is valuable. It fosters innovation and meaningful, sustainable transformation and change. Why? Because it forces these actors, which were comfortably working in their own silos, to work together on water challenges. They need to use methods and innovations that often private and non-profit actors bring in. Many projects in FDW have shown that the partnerships brought new perspectives and thinking for all involved. In many cases this has led to better practices and a change in mindset in both people and organizations. This is key to any meaningful and sustainable change.

We witness good examples in many FDW projects. Improved water efficiency in the sugar cane and cotton value chains in India and South Africa, better rural and urban drinking water supply in Uganda, Ethiopia and the Philippines through low-tech and operational service model innovations, coastal zone management in Indonesia and novel business models in rural sanitation in Kenya and Bangladesh, to name but a few!

As with any subsidy scheme there are failures as well. Involvement of a big corporation in a PPP project, for example, is by no means a key to continuation and financial sustainability of a new approach towards water efficiency. Sharing water data is difficult. Shifting from free to paid services remains an uphill struggle. Changing policies and contexts undermine business cases. But we learn, and as long as we share those learnings and use them in the development of new projects and programmes, failures are meaningful and important.

10 years is a milestone for a successful programme. Successful not only for its delivery on key outputs and outcomes, but most of all for its stimulation of fresh thinking and innovation in water-related development aid.

#valuewater

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