

## An Online Space for Practitioners in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector

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**Abstract :** The increasing availability and quality of internet access throughout the developing world provides an opportunity to utilize online spaces to disseminate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) knowledge to practitioners. Since 2001, CAWST has provided in-person education, training and consulting services to thousands of WASH practitioners all over the world, supporting them to start, troubleshoot, improve and expand their WASH projects. As CAWST continues to grow, the organization faces challenges in meeting demand from clients and in providing consistent, timely technical support. In 2012, CAWST began utilizing online spaces to expand its reach by developing a series of resources websites and webinars. CAWST has developed a WASH Education and Training resources website, a Biosand Filter (BSF) Knowledge Base, a Household Water Treatment and Safe Storage Knowledge Base, a mobile app for offline users, a live chat support tool, a WASH e-library, and a series of webinar-style online training sessions to complement its in-person capacity development services. In order to determine the preliminary outcomes of providing these online services, CAWST has monitored and analyzed registration to the online spaces, downloads of the educational materials, and webinar attendance; as well as conducted user surveys. The purpose of this analysis was to find out who was using the online spaces, where users came from, and how the resources were being used. CAWST's WASH Resources website has served over 5,800 registered users from 3,000 organizations in 183 countries. Additionally, the BSF Knowledge Base has served over 1000 registered users from 68 countries, and over 540 people from 73 countries have attended CAWST's online training sessions. This indicates that the online spaces are effectively reaching a large numbers of users, from a range of countries. A 2016 survey of the Biosand Filter Knowledge Base showed that approximately 61% of users are practitioners, and 39% are either researchers or students. Of the respondents, 46% reported using the BSF Knowledge Base to initiate a BSF project and 43% reported using the information to train BSF technicians. Finally, 61% indicated they would like even greater support from CAWST's Technical Advisors going forward. The analysis has provided an encouraging indication that CAWST's online spaces are contributing to its objective of engaging and supporting WASH practitioners to start, improve and expand their initiatives. CAWST has learned several lessons during the development of these online spaces, in particular related to the resources needed to create and maintain the spaces, and respond to the demand created. CAWST plans to continue expanding its online spaces, improving user experience of the sites, and involving new contributors and content types. Through the use of online spaces, CAWST has been able to increase its global reach and impact without significantly increasing its human resources by connecting WASH practitioners with the information they most need, in a practical and accessible manner. This paper presents on CAWST's use of online spaces through the CAWST-developed platforms discussed above and the analysis of the use of these platforms.

**Keywords :** education and training, knowledge sharing, online resources, water and sanitation

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