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**Background Paper for the Symposium:**

**Learning Alliances for scaling up innovative approaches  
in the Water and Sanitation sector**

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# Table of Contents

<b>List of Acronyms</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Section 1. Learning Alliances: theory and concepts</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1. Definition: What is a Learning Alliance?.....	8
1.2. Why are Learning Alliances necessary?.....	8
1.3. The Learning Alliance concept and approach .....	10
1.4. How Learning Alliances relate to other relevant concepts .....	11
<b>Section 2. Establishing and working with Learning Alliances</b> .....	<b>14</b>
2.1. Stakeholder identification, and roles and responsibilities with LAs.....	14
2.2. Working at different levels .....	17
2.3. Building blocks for learning alliances .....	18
<b>Section 3. Experiences of applying the LA approach and concept</b> .....	<b>23</b>
3.1. Lessons learnt from existing programmes on the Learning Alliances approach.....	26
<b>Section 4. Next steps and leading questions</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Section 5. References, bibliography and further reading</b> .....	<b>30</b>
5.1. Books, manuals, articles and papers .....	30
5.2. Websites .....	31
5.3. References .....	32
<b>Section 6. Annexes</b> .....	<b>34</b>
Annex 1 – IRC project experience with Learning Alliances .....	34
Annex 2. A flexible framework for establishing and working with Learning Alliances.....	47
<b>Contacts</b> .....	<b>52</b>

## List of Acronyms

AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Information System
AI	Anchoring Institute
BUS initiative	Basic Urban Services initiative
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIAT	Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical
CINARA	Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo en Agua Potable, Saneamiento Básico y Conservación del Recurso Hídrico
CoP	Communities of Practice
DfID	Department for International Development
DGIS	Directorate General for International Cooperation of the Netherlands Government
DLA	District Learning Alliance
EMPOWERS Partnership	Euro-Mediterranean Participatory Water Resources Scenarios Partnership
EU PCM	European Union Project Cycle Management
IDRC	International Development Research Institute
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRC	International Water and Sanitation Centre
IRWGs	Inter-Institutional Regional Working Groups
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
LA	Learning Alliance
MSF	Multi Stage Filtration
MSP	Multi Stakeholder Platform
MUS project	Multiple Use Systems
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLA	National Learning Alliance
O&M	Operation & Maintenance
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PTD	Participatory Technology Development
QPA	Quantified Participatory Assessment
RAAKS	Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems
RC	Resource Centre
RCN	Resource Centre Network
RIDA	Resources Infrastructure Demand Access
SC	Steering Committee
SCP	Sustainable Cities Programme
SDCA	Stakeholder Dialogue and Concerted Action
SWAP	Sector Wide Approach
SWELL	Securing Water to Enhance Local Livelihoods
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TLP	Team Learning Projects
TRANSCOL	Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
Woreda	District (Ethiopia)
WRA	Water Resources Assessment
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WUAs	Water Users Associations

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## Executive Summary

Learning Alliances are a series of connected stakeholder platforms, created at key institutional levels (typically national, intermediate and local/community) and designed to break down barriers to both horizontal and vertical information sharing and thus to speed up the process of identification, development and uptake of innovation. Each platform is intended to group together a range of partners with complementary capabilities in such areas as implementation, regulation, policy and legislation, research and learning and documentation and dissemination.

The central premise of the Learning Alliance approach is that, by giving as much attention to the *processes* of innovating and scaling up innovation as is normally given to the subject of the innovation itself, barriers to uptake and replication can be overcome. The Learning Alliance approach has arisen from a sense of frustration over the evident failure of much relevant and effective innovation – technological or institutional – to move beyond the pilot stage.

A number of reasons for these failures can be identified, including most seriously:

- Innovation that takes place in an environment that does not reflect the realities of the country or region concerned. It is not productive to ignore or circumvent inbuilt barriers to progress in order to have a successful pilot. Scaling up will be impossible if problems such as weak institutions, unfavourable legislation, or lack of financing opportunities are not addressed and overcome at the pilot stage.
- Pilot projects that are implemented by large, well equipped project teams working intensively with communities. It is not realistic to expect successful scaling up from such a base if similar resources cannot be deployed more widely or if personnel with similar skills are not available in the country.
- Innovation and knowledge creation is not consolidated and built into a structured system. In such cases dissemination typically happens at the end of the project when it is too late for meaningful transfer of knowledge or ownership.
- Failure to create national (or even local) ownership of activities. This can happen when project teams work in isolation, in a sort of institutional vacuum. Without effective links to the relevant levels of administration there can be no effective mechanism for scaling up.
- Failure to build capacity for replication and scaling-up. Reliance on specialised project teams means that no additional capacity is created within the institutions that, in the longer term, are expected to either replicate or support the innovation.

The Learning Alliance approach is intended to overcome these problems by systematically addressing the issues surrounding going to scale *as part of the same process* as undertaking the innovation itself. It aims to do this by:

- Carrying out innovation and learning within an alliance of practitioners, researchers, policy makers and activists who, together, will provide an ‘engine’ for uptake and replication.
- Ensuring that innovation happens in a context (institutional, financial) that is realistic for a given country or region, making the innovation suitable for quick uptake.
- Making explicit where extra resources must be brought to bear for specific technical or institutional reasons, and analysing how these extra resources can be found/created within the structures that will scale up the innovation.
- Creating an environment in which it is possible to be honest and open about lessons learned – particularly failures.

- Creating an environment in which flexibility and adaptation to local circumstances become the norm when dealing with complex developmental problems.

Learning Alliances are proposed as a more effective alternative to conventional approaches for scaling up innovations in the water and sanitation sector. While a relatively new concept they draw heavily on a number of already well known approaches including, particularly, action research and social learning. They are currently being used in a number of IRC projects, looking at issues as diverse as multiple-use water services, local level integrated water resource management and the provision of basic urban services. All of these projects are at an early stage of development but they have nevertheless provided a number of useful lessons and highlighted several questions for the future. These include:

#### **Lessons learned:**

- *There are no technological or methodological silver bullets:* Developmental processes are highly complex. There are no simple or single technological or methodological answers. Innovations often fail to be scaled up because they are “alien objects” with no roots in local contexts; they are not integrated into the enabling environment necessary to support and sustain them. It is the *process* of creating the enabling environment through learning among different stakeholders which will lead to impact and sustainability.
- *Learning Alliances take time and resources:* The process of making a few stakeholders interested in the concept, then inviting several other stakeholders to initiate the process and then keeping the process going takes time and resources.
- *Learning Alliances need an engine:* Champions are needed to sell the idea, organise the initial meetings and keep the process going after these first steps have been taken.
- *Learning, not planning, is the main focus of Learning Alliances:* In conventional approaches most meetings tend to be about planning and negotiation, not learning. Central to the learning alliance approach is the importance of creating the space to enable learning through negotiation. Failures must be allowed and must be discussed openly. Making the learning component the focus of the process requires good facilitators and committed stakeholders.
- *Documentation, reporting and dissemination need a specific budget and time allocation throughout the process:* In a Learning Alliance the learning is done throughout the process, not at the end. For this to happen, documentation, reporting and dissemination should be properly planned for.

#### **Outstanding questions:**

- *The learning process:* How can we best mediate the introduction of new information and its transformation into knowledge? How can we create a pro-learning environment?
- *Facilitation:* Learning Alliances require skilled facilitators. But who should facilitate such processes? Where do the skills exist?
- *Project management and funding:* Will we need to change existing models such as log frames that are focused on goals, objectives and outputs and ignore the process of innovation, adaptation and change?

All these issues, as well as others identified by other partners, will be discussed in more detail during the Learning Alliances symposium that will take place in Delft between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2005.

## Introduction

The term Learning Alliance is of fairly recent coinage, although many of the concepts behind it have been under development in different sectors for some time. In particular they build heavily on the concept of action learning, as well as ideas of social learning more generally. The term has been adopted by CIAT (Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical) who advocate the use of Learning Alliances by the CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) as a means of increasing the effectiveness and relevance of research, the impact of development work and better informed policies (Lundy and Ashby, 2004).

This paper sets out for further discussion the main concepts underlying IRC's approach to Learning Alliances as an innovative way of thinking about the structures and processes necessary to support stakeholder-led innovations and bring them to scale as quickly and effectively as possible. In other words, to focus on the process of innovation and scaling-up rather than, as is more usually the case, on the subject of the innovation.

The paper centres on innovation in the context of sustainable domestic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, and in the associated fields of multiple water use and water resource management. It nevertheless draws heavily on experiences in many other sectors, in particular those dealing with agricultural research and extension, and knowledge management.

The paper has been prepared as background to the upcoming Symposium on Learning Alliances, to be held in the Netherlands between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of June, 2005. As such its aim is to set out in as succinct a manner as possible the key concepts underlying this approach and to outline the current state of thinking about how to move forward.

This paper is divided into six main sections:

- Section 1 deals with the conceptual background to Learning Alliances
- Section 2 deals with some of the practicalities of setting up and facilitating Learning Alliances
- Section 3 outlines lessons learnt from programmes where IRC and partners have been implementing and working with Learning Alliances (Further detailed in Annex 1)
- Section 4 discusses the next steps and raises some questions about the further development of the Learning Alliances approach
- Section 5 provides an annotated bibliography and references for further reading
- Section 6 – The Annexes. Annex1 details project experiences with Learning Alliances. In Annex 2 a flexible framework is proposed for establishing and working with Learning Alliances

## Section 1. Learning Alliances: theory and concepts

### 1.1. Definition: What is a Learning Alliance?

At its simplest a Learning Alliances is a series of linked platforms, existing at different institutional levels (national, district, community, etc.) and created with the aim of bringing together a range of stakeholders interested in innovation and the creation of new knowledge in an area of common interest. The stakeholders involved should have complementary capabilities which, when combined, will allow the new knowledge created in the innovation process to be brought to scale. Some of the key capabilities required are in: implementation, regulation, policy and legislation, research and learning, and documentation and dissemination.

Learning alliances require facilitation to overcome barriers to interaction and communication within and between the stakeholder platforms. They aim to enable a shared learning process in which barriers to horizontal and vertical information sharing are broken down.

Learning alliances, by involving key stakeholders at all levels in the process of knowledge creation, aim to ensure that innovation takes place within a framework of local and national conditions and norms that ensure that what is produced is relevant and appropriate.

#### **Scaling up**

Scaling-up is understood to include not only the widespread replication of an innovation but also (and critically) its quality and sustainability. Rapid replication, for example of borehole and hand-pump installation, is of no use if the systems and services replicated are not sustainable in the long term. Learning Alliances aim to address the critical issue of sustainability by looking not only at the innovation itself but also at the enabling environment necessary to maintain and sustain it.

### 1.2. Why are Learning Alliances necessary?

Why is a conceptual model such as that proposed under the title of a ‘learning alliance’ necessary? Simply put, we believe that, due to a number of failings in conventional models of knowledge development and innovation, much innovative and potentially useful work never succeeds in moving beyond the original area in which it was piloted. Indeed much innovation takes place with no clear model for its uptake rather than a vague idea that following the ‘research’ there must be some ‘dissemination’. We believe that, by putting the *process* of innovation and the *scaling-up* of innovation centre stage, and by designing the structures that will carry out the innovation with the explicit intention of avoiding some of these failings, we will significantly reduce the potential for good innovation to simply wither from lack of support.

In this section we outline some of the key failings of earlier work, including that of IRC, that have either prevented good ideas from taking off or impeded the rate of their development.



### **Failure of research to lead to developmental impacts**

The failure of academic (on station, non-participatory etc.) research to lead to the desired impacts in terms of changes in policy and practice is now well documented and understood (see for example Röling, 1986). There is also a long history of efforts to overcome this shortcoming through action research, farmer learning and other interactive methodologies (Leeuwis and Pyburn, 2002b). Some improvement has resulted but there have still been cases of limited impact because innovations were not immediately suitable for wide-spread uptake (see next point). Sometimes too, innovations have been taken forward by implementers (NGOs, donors, governments). Rope pumps, treadle pumps, community gardens, family ponds and community small-dams are all well-known innovations that have come from implementing organisations rather than “researchers” (Alberts and van der Zee, 2004; Robinson et al., 2004; Polak et al., 2004; Shah et al., 2000). Yet many of these local innovations have also failed to go to scale.

### **Failure to deal with the environment in which innovation took place**

While the adoption of action research and related approaches has led to great strides in making research activities and agendas more relevant and practical it has, in many cases, focussed exclusively on the level of the individual or the community. This has often meant that organisations and institutions (such as water service providers or local representatives of line departments) intended to support these communities have been sidelined, sometimes even becoming seen as ‘part of the problem’. This is counter-productive because all these players have specific roles and are essential links in the chain necessary for the wider provision of water services. Without their participation the founding research agenda may be incomplete or misdirected and ultimately the impact of an innovation can become limited and unsustainable because the institutions vital to scaling up have not been represented in the LA. Experience suggests that, where local innovation has been successfully scaled up, for instance with rope pumps in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe (Alberts and van der Zee, 2004; Robinson et al., 2004), or treadle pumps in Bangladesh (Shah et al., 2000) it has been achieved by working closely within the realities of the country.

### **Failure to acknowledge the means that innovators bring to their task**

A special case of the general problem of failing to take into account the environment in which innovation takes place, is that of researchers or external implementers failing to acknowledge the importance of their own role in processes of innovation. This can be as simple as the critical importance of having an outsider as ‘honest broker’ in a whole range of activities. But it often goes much further, with a range of resources brought to bear to solve a problem that is utterly unrealistic in terms of future replication. Depressingly familiar examples of this sort of practice include: subsidising inputs for farmers; paying for people’s participation; subsidising the use of highly trained facilitators to overcome bottlenecks; creating parallel structures to bypass ‘failing’ government; using highly motivated project teams that cannot be replicated; unrealistic levels of resources for PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) - vehicles, fuel for vehicles, per-diems for government staff and so on. Understanding the weaknesses (and strengths) of the institutions that are supposed to be the future implementers and supporters of innovative approaches, and designing such approaches within that institutional setting is essential to sustainability and scaling up.

### **Failure to consolidate learning, share knowledge and build capacity**

Researchers, NGOs, donors and other implementers typically come into a community, do their research (participatory or otherwise), produce a report and some academic papers, do a ‘dissemination workshop’ and move on to the next project. Often there is no consolidation of lessons learned, no true sharing of results and no development of national or district-level ownership. Uptake and scaling-up is left to ill-defined processes of ‘dissemination’ and ‘advocacy’. This type of

research programme does not allow for capacity building within the relevant regulatory and implementing institutions such as local government, the private sector, NGOs and extension services. Staff in these agencies are not given the skills to take the innovations to scale.

### **Sector fragmentation**

The above problems are fairly generic to any process of innovation but one additional set of issues is more specific to the water and sanitation sector. It is that of fragmentation into a number of sub-sectors, principally those dealing with a) domestic water supply, b) sewerage and waste-water, c) irrigation, d) water resources management, and of course e) health.

At the same time the sector is linked with many other sectors such as local government, rural development, social welfare and health. In the past centralised planning has made it difficult to bring these (typically) governmental stakeholders together to work effectively at the local level or to obtain synergies between them. Joint planning, financing and implementation of interventions has therefore been difficult. The more recent trends to decentralisation offer a platform at the intermediate level<sup>1</sup> and the opportunity to bring these actors together for more ‘joined up’ planning.

## **1.3. The Learning Alliance concept and approach**

The concept of Learning Alliances is built around the central proposition that only an integrated approach to the process of innovation, bringing together all stakeholders (practitioners, researchers, policy makers, activists), can address the range of failings described above. At the same time the processes of interaction within the Learning Alliance should foster a sense of ownership of the founding concepts and approaches, ensuring that the innovation developed is appropriate to the local situation and capable of replication with existing (or realistically achievable) resources, institutions, and policies.

It is to achieve this that the three key levels of National, Intermediate and Community are seen as being the most important to work with in a Learning Alliance. It is assumed, broadly speaking, that national authorities will remain responsible for broader issues of policy and legislation, that decisions on planning, implementation and support will generally be made at the intermediate level and that the community is the level at which most WASH interventions take place and have their primary locus of management.

The Learning Alliance concept is not radically new or strikingly innovative. It is an attempt to build on a range of lessons learned from past failures (and successes) and to make the process of innovation and the scaling up of innovation the central focus of attention. The LA concept should not be seen as one more attempt to find a developmental silver bullet. On the contrary the base assumption is that complex developmental problems cannot be solved by quick fixes. The route to sustainability lies through the development of local knowledge to support local solutions while accounting for local realities. LAs are proposed as a mechanism to facilitate and guide this adaptive and flexible approach.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term intermediate level to indicate the local level where decisions are being taken. The exact administrative name for that level may differ from country to country. In some places it is called a district, in others a municipality, a governorate or a local council. Sometimes there may even be 2 or 3 tiers of intermediate level. Put simply these are the levels between national government and the communities.

## **Knowledge, Information and Innovation**

Knowledge, information and innovation, and the way that they relate to each other are critical concepts within this document. They are briefly explained here.

Throughout the document the term knowledge is used to describe the intrinsic ability of individuals or groups to carry out actions. The term information refers to knowledge that has been made explicit or coded, in books, papers, manuals or other media.

Innovation is used to refer to the process by which new knowledge is created in groups or individuals who did not have it before. Innovation does not therefore refer per-se to absolutely new concepts. It can also refer to the mediated introduction of existing information to a group of actors or to a context in which it has not been applied before.

Innovation can be a completely new type of pump; but it can equally well be the necessary institutional arrangements or policies needed to introduce an existing pump to a location where it has never been used before.

### **1.4. How Learning Alliances relate to other relevant concepts**

In this section we briefly look at some of the key concepts which preceded Learning Alliances and on which the latter are built. These include, action research, communities of practice, stakeholder platforms and participatory research and learning in the agricultural sector.

#### **Action research**

Action research uses approaches designed to solve practical problems in support of and with the active collaboration of stakeholders. It is a flexible process which allows action and multidisciplinary research to be achieved at the same time (Dick, 2002). It is a win-win format: the action is more efficient and the research more relevant. A critical concept of action research is cycles of active experimentation followed by reflection. This cyclical approach is fundamental to any system that wants to create adaptive, flexible and context-specific knowledge. It is therefore of key importance in Learning Alliances.

#### **Capacity building**

Traditional approaches to capacity building often confuse it with training. While training and education are of course enablers of increased capacity it is vital that people are, at the same time, given the opportunity to put their new knowledge into practice. Learning Alliances provide a structured framework for doing so by integrating the capacity building process into the ongoing planning and implementation activities of sector organisations and communities. In this way capacity building is also reinforced by the action/reflection cycles of the action research approach.

#### **Multi Stakeholder platforms**

There are several definitions and types of Multi Stakeholder Platform (MSP) but in essence an MSP is a “negotiation and/or decision-making body (voluntary or statutory) comprising different stakeholders who perceive the same resource management problem and realize their interdependence

in solving it” (Warner and Verhallen, 2004). Although conceptualised primarily as negotiating platforms there is no reason why MSPs should not also have a learning role.

As such, the Learning Alliance model can be seen as a series of linked multi-stakeholder platforms at key institutional levels. What is of particular value from the experience of MSPs is the facilitation skills needed to effectively manage platforms where, despite (or perhaps because of) a shared interest, there exist strong political and social forces that, if not carefully managed, can lead to the platform splitting apart and failing in its main intention.

### **Agricultural sector experiences in participatory research and social learning**

There are many analogies between LAs and the development of research and uptake in the agricultural sector. Röling (1986) describes the history of agricultural research in relation to uptake of innovations by farmers, and how the extension services were identified as a crucial link between farmers and researchers. Taken together, research, extension, and use of knowledge can be analysed from a so-called agricultural knowledge and information system (AKIS) perspective. The AKIS is defined as *“the articulated set of actors, networks and/or organisations, expected or managed to work synergistically to support knowledge processes which improve the correspondence between knowledge and environment, and/or the control provided through technology use in a given domain of human activity”* (Röling, 1992).

Since the earliest use of AKIS a number of organisations have taken the concepts and approaches forward in forms appropriate to the practical application of their organisation’s work. Of particular interest is the work done by CIAT (Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical), who are developing and adopting a Learning Alliance approach in their Rural Agro-enterprise Development Project (Lundy, 2004; Lundy and Ashby, 2004). In their work, a Learning Alliance is understood as a *“process undertaken jointly by research organizations, donor and development agencies, policy makers and the private sector through which good practices, in both research and development, are identified, shared, adapted and used to strengthen capacities, improve practices, generate and document development outcomes, identify future research needs and potential areas for collaboration and inform both public and private policy decisions”* (Lundy and Ashby, 2004). A definition that is very similar to the one used here, with the important difference that it does not deal explicitly with the issue of institutional levels.

### **Resource Centres**

In many places there are extension services to assist farmers and agro-enterprises in innovation and improving their practices. In the water and sanitation sector such a role can be played by Resource Centres (RCs) as *“organisations or networks of organisations that provide support services to the water and sanitation sector, in an independent way”* (IRC, 2004a).

Resource Centre Networks (RCNs) can play an important role in the facilitation and outreach of learning alliances. They are typically engaged in activities such as:

- Analysis of policies and sector trends and developments;
- Facilitation of platforms for dialogue;
- Documentation and sharing of best practices;
- Stimulation of a learning environment;
- Facilitation of the systematic dissemination of information from policy to implementation and vice versa.

Resource Centre Networks prevent the fragmentation of information and knowledge and the duplication of effort that can result when the typical functions of a Resource Centre are spread over a large number of organisations in an uncoordinated way.

However, in many places individual Resource Centres or Resource Centre Networks for the WASH sector are not yet as established as those for agricultural extension services, nor are they positioned as such in the sector. This often leaves both implementing organisations and end users in the water sector without effective “extension” support and feed-back into research and policy agendas.

Therefore much attention is currently being given to strengthening RCs in a number of countries through, for example the IRC RCD (Resource Centre Development) programme and the DfID (Department for International Development) funded WELL programme (WELL, 2004).

### **Communities of Practice**

Finally in this section, it is worth looking briefly at entities that, while of interest in themselves, are not a learning alliance. Communities of Practice (CoP) are currently seen as a promising way of setting up structured learning processes between practitioners and academics from different organisations. However, one critical difference is that CoPs are typically composed of *peers* - people from similar backgrounds who support each other in the learning process. LAs, in contrast, are specifically intended to bring together actors with very different roles and backgrounds.

## **Section 2. Establishing and working with Learning Alliances**

Learning Alliances are a new approach to taking innovations to scale although, as the case studies referred to in Section 3 and Annex 1 will show, the conceptual model derives much from several past and ongoing activities in this area. This section describes what we see as the most important factors to be taken into account when setting out to establish and work within a learning alliance framework. These ideas are in a relatively early stage of development and will require further testing before they can be formalised as a true methodology. For now they serve as a starting point.

### **2.1. Stakeholder identification, and roles and responsibilities with LAs**

All learning alliances will begin with a core or founding group of actors whose interest in innovation is to be served by the creation of a learning alliance. It is crucial that this core group has a clear idea of what they want to achieve and how they intend to do it. Only in this way will they be able to attract the interest of other key stakeholders. The core group will get bigger as the work of the alliance increases and more stakeholders buy into the idea.

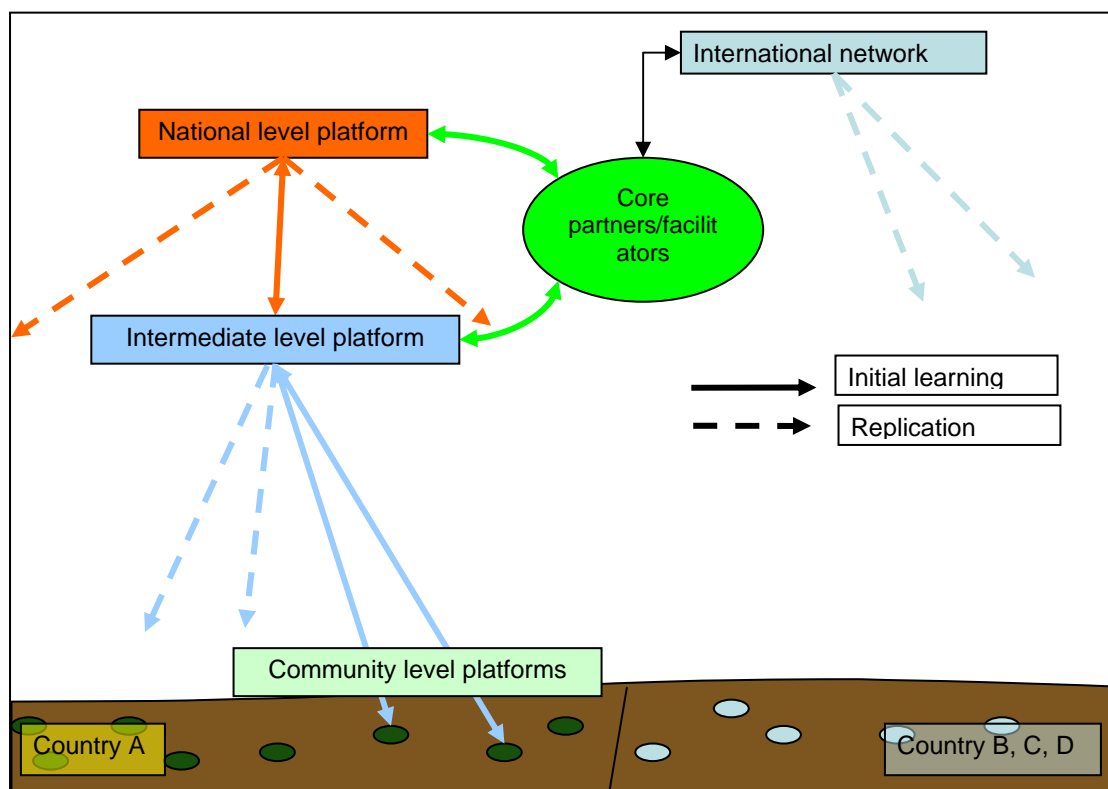
There can be no hard rules about who should be involved and in what manner. It will depend on such factors as the specific work topic, the organisations available and interested, the resources available, etc. What is important is that stakeholders have a shared vision of the objectives of the alliance and background skills that can contribute to achieving them.

Which stakeholders should be involved at the different levels (and different stages) is something to be worked out organically by the founding members as they seek to develop a coalition around their area of interest and innovation. Ideally, each participating organisation should have some existing level of interest in innovation related to a specific area. An important exception is actors without such a direct interest who, because of their position, could impede or block progress at a later stage. They should be drawn in to the Alliance to avoid or reduce that possibility.

Since facilitation is crucial to the overall success of a learning alliance the core team must, at an early stage, identify the person for that role. This can raise problems because some core members may feel they are suited to that position, whereas it is an essentially neutral role – not easily combined with the primary task of a core member in trying to move the alliance forward! Certainly, in the early stages of setting up the LA they will work in ‘advocacy’ mode – selling the idea to potential partners. But, if deciding to play a facilitating role, it will be necessary for them to relatively quickly shift into that mode – helping the new partners to understand, adapt and own their own vision and objectives – which will undoubtedly diverge from the original!

Questions to be asked at this stage include:

- What does the group want the Alliance to achieve?
- What does each member organisation want the Alliance to achieve?
- What can each organisation contribute in terms of expertise, effort and resources?



**Figure 1: Structure of Learning Alliances at different levels**

Deciding who is to be involved in an LA is critical both to the immediate success of sharing the results of action research and to the overall potential for successful scaling-up. Member organisations will vary according to the specific local and national conditions. Table 1 below identifies likely members of a Learning Alliance at national and intermediate (district/municipality) level.

**Table 1: Typical members of a Learning Alliance at national and district level**

At national level	At district level
- Policy makers	- Local government
- Line ministries (Water, Agriculture, Health)	- Catchment Councils
- National research institutes	- Local representatives of line ministries
- Resource Centres	- Local NGOs
- National training institutes	- CBOs, Water Users' Associations
- Financing organisations	- Local researchers, trainers and extension workers
- Donors and INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organisations)	- District fora (e.g. Provincial Water Task Team)
- Organised local government (e.g. Association of Local Government; Federation of Municipalities)	- Local private sector
- Organised CBOs (e.g. National Association of Community Based Water Provider Organisations)	- 'Projects'
- National fora (e.g. the National Task Force on Agriculture or the Water and Sanitation Forum)	- Other implementing partners
- Relevant private sector	- Organised CBOs (e.g. Regional Association of Community Based Water Provider Organisations)

Factors to take into account in the selection of members include:

- ongoing work that is relevant to the LA;
- interest in being involved;
- ability to commit and take decisions;
- ability to provide resources (financial, human);
- potential to take up findings (become a champion);
- ability to block or impede the project (local politicians for example may also be co-opted into the process);

It can be seen that the identification and selection of members of the LA is a complex process. It should be based on a thorough assessment process and a clear view of the role that members will take in further uptake and scaling-up. Table 2 provides an example of stakeholder mapping for a Learning Alliance being developed by the Multiple Use Systems project (see Section 3 & Annex 1).

**Table 2: Example of matrix for mapping stakeholders to be invited to the LA for the Multiple Use Systems (MUS) project<sup>2</sup>**

Category	Stakeholder	Role in LA	Strength	Weakness
Regulation / policy making	Ministry of Water	Review norms and standards	Capacity to scale up policies	Politicised
	Ministry of Agriculture	Create enabling policies	Capacity to scale up policies	Politicised
Innovation	National/ local University	Test new methodology Research	Strong in content	Often in isolation Overly academic
	Government Research centres			Under resourced
Planning	Local government	Adopt MUS approach in planning	Capacity to adopt approach and support uptake	Politicised Under-staffed
Implementing	District council/ line dept. of Ministry responsible for Domestic Water	Scale up through implementation	Big reach Continuous presence	Politicised Under-staffed
	Private sector actors	Scale up through implementation	Sustainable Flexible	Unaccountable Profit oriented - no poverty mandate
	INGO	Scale up through implementation	Reach Strong capacity	Non-continuity (temporarily in district)
	Department of irrigation	Investments and extension support	Strong extension officers	Sectoral bias Lack of flexibility
Dissemination / Advocacy	Association of Municipalities	Mobilise other district councils	Big reach Credibility with other district councils	Little content expertise

<sup>2</sup> More details about this and other projects in which IRC and partners are applying the Learning Alliances approach are given in Section 3.



	Resource Centre	Document and disseminate lessons learnt	Strong capacity	Often in isolation Under-resourced
	Local University			Often in isolation Under-resourced
Service provider (post-construction)	Community Based Organisation (CBO) in partnership with district council	Manage the innovation after project completion	Local level Relatively well skilled	Not very empowered communities
	Local private sector	Day to day Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Spare parts	Local level Flexible	May lack skills Profit driven (no poverty mandate)

## 2.2. Working at different levels

In order to better focus and tailor the needs of the different actors for multi-actor learning, Groot et al. (2002) discuss the concept of multiple nested subsystems. For LAs in the water and sanitation sector we propose to translate these subsystems to the administrative levels of water and sanitation services; i.e. the national, intermediate and community level.

When setting up LAs, it is important to consider how different levels relate to each other and who is a member of which platform at which level. Figure 2 illustrates an example, again from the MUS project. Government institutions at national level should be similar to (if not directly responsible for) those at district level. This ensures that activities at district level are compatible with what national government does and that activities at district level can easily be communicated to superiors at national level. Sometimes the national platform can be active in identifying a pilot district.

Effective communication between platforms at different levels of an Alliance is crucial. In case several platforms are involved, information flows, in all directions, are critical to ensuring that ownership of (and responsibility for working with) the findings of pilot activities is assumed by all.

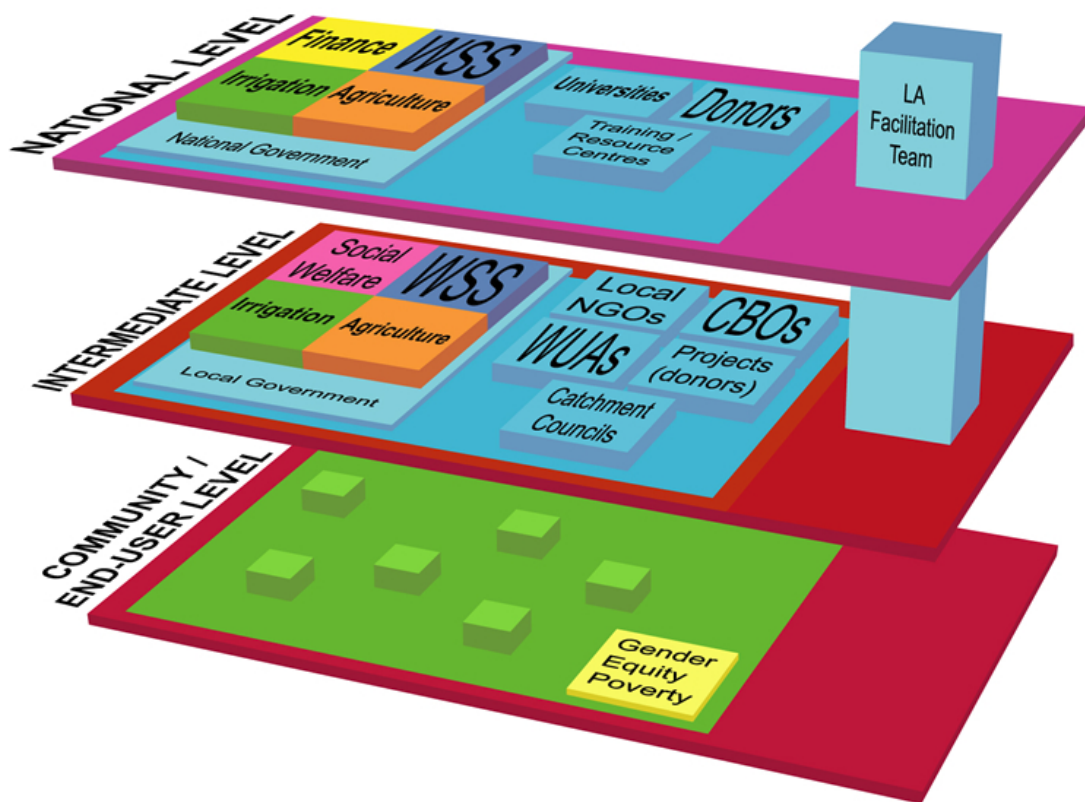


Figure 2: Linkages between district and national level platforms of a Learning Alliance: an example from the MUS project

### 2.3. Building blocks for learning alliances

Learning is not a straightforward process in which all are happy to participate. Given the sort of broad based alliances being targeted, there will undoubtedly be conflicting interests as well as resistance to change, especially if people find their positions threatened. Honest documenting and disseminating of findings may not be welcome - people do not like their faults to be exposed or to have to adapt their working methods. There will always be interests and power configurations, bringing many risks.

Avoiding (or minimising the impacts of) these risks is what makes the task of process facilitation for the Alliance absolutely critical. Support from a facilitator is needed for a wide range of activities, including: identifying and understanding different perspectives; constant checking that common understanding continues; sharing results and experiences both horizontally and vertically, within the Alliance and with outsiders; shared experimentation and learning within the boundaries of existing institutions and policies.

#### Action research

As already mentioned, the central approach used in Learning Alliances is action research, which refers to the application of research processes to the solving of practical problems in support of and with the active collaboration of key stakeholders. Extensive debates about participatory approaches have shown the importance of involving people in the analysis of problems and the design of solutions; using action as a basis for learning. This creates *ownership* of the problem and the

solution, and helps to develop the *skills and capacities* needed to tackle similar future problems and/or manage the solution in a sustainable manner.

Without going into the details of different participatory approaches and methodologies the common factor has been the full *participation* of people in the processes of *learning* about their needs, capabilities and visions, and about the *actions* required to address them. In many cases this has meant a focus only on the communities, resulting undoubtedly in some community empowerment but often at the expense of sidelining the organisations and institutions (such as water service providers or local representatives of line departments) around those communities.

Increasingly it is felt that intermediate level organisations have a key role to play in supporting communities in addressing their water-related needs. Therefore there is a need for different external (i.e. external to the community) stakeholders to *participate* actively in the process of *learning*. Specifically they must learn how they can best fulfil their community support role. The Learning Alliances approach provides the platform for action research with and between communities and these external stakeholders.

This means that action research needs to be designed to reflect not only the realities of communities, but also those of external support agencies. For example:

- **Working within planning cycles (project cycles).** This means developing a structure of joint problem identification, solution identification, action, reflection, lesson learning, identification/modification of new solutions, etc. that is, as much as possible, linked with the planning approaches commonly used by the involved organisations.
- **Developing capacity to learn and manage adaptively.** This means developing *capacities* to work in a new, more flexible way. Essentially it means extending the empowering effects of participatory approaches to intermediate level actors. A key hypothesis of the LA approach is that blue prints to common developmental problems do not exist. As a result capacity has to be developed to manage adaptively, i.e to work in cycles of hypothesis development, information collection and analysis, action, further analysis and reflection and the development of new hypotheses.

### **Process Documentation**

Process documentation is about capturing change processes in a way that helps others to understand and adopt them – hence leading to scaling up. Documenting the process (as well as the results) of the action research is critical to scaling up because we need to know *how* things were done; what worked, but also what didn't? What were the blockages and how were they overcome? Change is often frustrated by political and economic interests, by tradition, by attitudes e.g. by conservatism and resistance. Capturing, or recording, the struggle over interests, resistance and direct or indirect protest is good: for learning, revealing agendas, encouraging struggle and for adaptive management.

In addition, the expected outcomes or impacts of a Learning Alliance are often intangible, such as changes in attitude, behaviour and practice of key stakeholders or changes in paradigms for water and sanitation development. Process documentation is also a tool to monitor and evaluate these more intangible impacts.

- Process documentation is a more systematic way to enhance the informal recording of events by the personal “radar” that many people use during complex programmes.
- Process documentation allows those most closely involved to step back far enough to be able to reflect on trends, patterns, opportunities and warning signs so that corrective action can be taken

if and when needed. This also helps programme staff to step back from the fight over good outcomes.

- Process documentation specifically looks at (local) context, at history, at patterns. It acknowledges that something was going on before the start of the project that may make impact upon or hold relevance for the current process.
- Process documentation is like keeping a diary. It allows daily reflection on events. Over time a diary will reveal recurring themes and patterns.
- Process documentation is not another project tool – it aims specifically at getting interesting and exciting information to other groups as quickly as possible. It provides programme staff with a bit more journalism and a bit less academic output.
- Process documentation helps to create and maintain political support; shows that things are happening and that people are continuing to interact.

For good analysis and reflection, process documentation needs a theory of change – owned by all stakeholders or by a programme team. Without a shared conceptual starting point there is nothing to reflect on, nothing to perceive as changing. Most programmes have implicit theories and assumptions which need to be made explicit.

Process documentation can be done by “insiders” (all stakeholders as members of a learning alliance) because their involvement in documentation stimulates their reflection and thus, learning. Alternatively, independent “outsiders” (such as journalists, film makers) can be involved, because they are in a “safer” position to objectively observe the process and to express criticism. However, one should be aware that “outsiders” can sometimes put too much of their own reflection and experience into the outputs and can go completely off track.

A number of organisations have developed methodologies and tools for process documentation and monitoring of qualitative change. A good resource document is the manual on Outcome Mapping, developed by IDRC (International Development Research Institute) (IDRC, 2004). This provides a complete overview of building learning and reflecting into development programmes. Simple tools can be derived from this and other frameworks.

Steps that IRC follows on process documentation in its programmes include (See Table 3 and Table 4):

- Capturing the change process;
- Reflecting on processes and analyzing (find the recurrent patterns and trends);
- Organising the information in specific formats for specific groups;
- Disseminating quickly enough to be most useful.

**Table 3: example of a country work plan for process documentation**

<b>Country Work Plan</b>					
<b>Capturing</b>	<b>Capturing</b>	<b>Organising/filing</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Outputs/editing</b>	<b>Channels</b>
What	How/who	How/Who	When/who	How/who	

**Table 4: example of a project plan for process documentation for the Basic Urban Services initiative – (see Section 3)**

<b>Documentation matrix from BUS (Basic Urban Services) initiative</b>			
<b>What (process)</b>	<b>What (is documented)</b>	<b>Who to collect?</b>	<b>How to document?</b>
Roles played, expectations created (and fulfilled) and obstacles encountered by different stakeholders	Roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders at the start	Anchoring Institute (AI)	SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Trends) analysis
	Review of changes in roles and responsibilities at the end of the project	Local Consultants	Participatory assessment
	Identified needs and expectations of different stakeholders	CBO/NGOs	Formal/informal interviews
	Obstacles to fulfilling expectations	Other stakeholders such as private sector, users, etc.	Stakeholder focus group and consultation meetings
	Expectations that were fulfilled		Observations from meetings, field visits, etc

<b>Documentation matrix from BUS initiative</b>				
<b>Tools</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who to analyse?</b>	<b>Potential End Product</b>	<b>Audience</b>
SWOT tool	Ongoing process, in particular at key meetings and after key events	AI	Case studies or brief case examples for illustrating approach in a larger case study write up of BUS experience	Other municipalities
QPA <sup>3</sup> (Quantified Participatory Assessment)		Local consultant		National and local level policy makers
Interview protocol		BUS implementation team		Donor agencies
Facilitated stakeholder consultation meetings		Local municipalities	Advocacy materials for stakeholder involvement	Local CBOs/NGOs
Observation protocol				
Log book				

### **Dissemination and sharing**

Traditionally dissemination was done after a research project had come to its conclusion. Learning and action research programmes however, are not traditional scientific research. The researchers are just one of many stakeholder groups in a Learning Alliance. Furthermore, the cycle of research-reflection-action is much shorter. This means that results or findings are more quickly available even if they are temporary. It also means that findings do not have to be - and should not be - phrased in traditional scientific language.

<sup>3</sup> Quantified Participatory Assessment is a methodology that collects qualitative information from rapid village assessments and converts some of this information into quantitative form. The details about this methodology are outside the scope of this paper, but more information can be found in (James 2002).

Dissemination in learning and action research programmes is context specific. The aim is not to bring the results to a global website but back into the learning process. The primary target audience, therefore, is the stakeholders participating in the learning programme. Additionally, there will be a need for quick advocacy-type messages to a wider group – see Box 1 for key lessons on dissemination.

In learning and action research programmes *feedback* is important: feedback in the Learning Alliances, from one stakeholder group to another; feedback after bits of research or experiments; feedback from one level of learning (district) to another (national). What has been learned and documented has to be fed back into the learning process and that is the most important dissemination function.

In addition, *advocacy* will always remain an important function: the learning process must sell itself to be credible and respected by the wider group of stakeholders – those who are not participating directly in the learning programme.

New electronic equipment is very useful in short cycles of dissemination: Digital cameras, digital video, and audio recording equipment. And computers have relatively easy software programmes for editing (video and photo) and making presentations. Local media will also be needed to disseminate information.

#### **Box 1: key lessons for dissemination in learning programmes**

**Quick:** the village walk/meeting/case study is documented today, analysed and edited tomorrow and shared the day after tomorrow. Video bites, photo books, case studies, observation reports, interview reports are the products. But they need to fit into local methods and media of sharing information because these processes are country based.

**Dirty:** the aim is to stimulate reflection, so the narrative and the stories of the makers (project team, one stakeholder group to another) are more important than the quality of the image.

**With professional support:** not for good technical results but for support in observing with distance. Professionals are outsiders; they know how to step out of the process and that is where they can help. Professionals can also be used to make end products: A video film, an article, website structure, content management etc.

**Time for processing, editing, writing etc.:** If we acknowledge that documentation and dissemination are crucial in the learning process, than explicit time has to be made available for doing it – if necessary, with professional support.

**The stakeholders in the learning alliance are the most important target group:** Reporting to each other – stakeholder to stakeholder – country team to country team – district team to national team – communities to bureaucrats etc.

The quick and dirty can feed afterwards into more glossy presentations, websites, photo books, etc. to convince national policy makers and donors not directly participating in the learning programme.

### **Section 3. Experiences of applying the LA approach and concept**

In recent years IRC, along with several partners has been, and remains, involved in projects and programmes that include many of the components now brought together as a Learning Alliance. Several of these are presented very briefly in table 5, and in more detail in Annex 1. They apply the basic concepts of Learning Alliances in different thematic areas and in combination with different processes, such as technology transfer, stakeholder dialogues and action research. More recently, three of these projects have been created from the outset with the learning alliance model specifically in mind. The remainder of this section briefly summarizes some of the main lessons learned from these projects, with greater detail appearing in Annex 1.

**Table 5: Ongoing and ended project of IRC and partners in which elements of a Learning Alliance approach were present**

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Main activities</b>	<b>Elements of LA</b>
Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia (TRANSCOL)	Colombia	1989-1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of multi-stage filtration technology to Colombia</li> <li>• Training of staff in introduction and use of technology</li> <li>• Support to resource centre (CINARA) development</li> <li>• Introduction of community-supported water surveillance and control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdisciplinary project team hosted in CINARA</li> <li>• Inter-Institutional regional working groups (Govt, universities, private sector)</li> <li>• Piloting in each region (with IRWGs)</li> <li>• Did not have: an explicit national government level although contacts were made at national level</li> </ul>
Women, Wellbeing, Work, Waste and Sanitation (4Ws)	India, Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka	2003 – ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action research on the safe re-use of night-soil and reduction of unsafe hygiene practices</li> <li>• Introduction of gender and poverty sensitive participatory approaches in peri-urban sanitation</li> <li>• Creating employment for women as latrine masons and in solid-waste collection and recycling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of platforms at national, regional and local level.</li> <li>• Project led by consortium of researchers and NGOs, platforms included wider range of government, NGO, and private sector stakeholders</li> </ul>
Euro-Mediterranean Participatory Water Resource Scenarios (EMPOWRS)	Jordan, Palestine, Egypt	2003 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder dialogue for improved local level water governance</li> <li>• Development of range of participatory planning tools to support improved development and management of water services and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of platforms at national, intermediate and local level</li> <li>• 3 country, and one regional facilitation teams with institutional, facilitation and documentation skills</li> <li>• Explicit mandate to work on improved vertical and horizontal information flows between key stakeholders</li> <li>• Broad district level coalitions of NGOs, CBOs, NGOs, and government</li> </ul>
Basic Urban Services (BUS) – Part of UN-HABITAT sustainable cities programme	Burkina-Faso, Sri-Lanka	2003 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing innovative processes and technologies for the provision of sustainable basic urban water and sanitation services to the urban poor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhere between multi-stakeholder platforms and networks</li> <li>• Anchoring institutes in each country act as facilitation engine for sustainability and continuity.</li> <li>• Facilitation of broad groups of partners within cities</li> <li>• Use of pilot sites to test innovative approaches w</li> </ul>



<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Main activities</b>	<b>Elements of LA</b>
Multiple Use Systems (MUS)	Zimbabwe, South-Africa, Ethiopia, Bolivia, Colombia, India, Nepal, Thailand	2004 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing tools, models and guidelines for the development of multiple-use (domestic and productive) water services in rural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project is just starting but aims to use an explicit approach to dealing with how to scale-up innovation the project</li> <li>A framework of key steps to take in establishing alliance has been developed (see annex 2)</li> <li>Action research will be carried out in pilot community district level MUS platforms</li> </ul>
Scaling-up community management	Ethiopia	2004 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopting a learning approach to developing models for external support to community managed rural water supply schemes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LA platforms at national, regional, and district level</li> <li>An explicit policy of action research and short cycle dissemination – with 5 months learning followed by 5 month reflection and dissemination</li> </ul>

### **3.1. Lessons learnt from existing programmes on the Learning Alliances approach**

*It is not the technology that is important, it is the framework to guide the process*

Technological innovations or developmental methodologies that are not scaled up have limited impact in improving water and sanitation services for the poorest. Often the failure to go to scale is related to how the innovation is introduced. There is little chance of success if an innovation deemed to have ‘worked’ in one context is transplanted en-bloc to another, totally different one. This simply sees the technology or methodology as the solution to a problem but ignores the crucial needs of an enabling environment to support it and the time to create local knowledge on how to use it. It is the process of creating this enabling environment through shared learning among different stakeholders that will, in time, increase the impact of interventions in the sector.

*Learning Alliances take time and resources*

The process of making a handful of stakeholders interested in a concept, then inviting several other stakeholders to initiate a process and then keeping the process going whilst building the coalition of stakeholders, takes time and resources. It is a process that cannot be short-circuited. Knowledge is the sum of what individuals and groups of people can do, and it can only be created by learning and doing. No course or cascade of courses can alone create new knowledge. People have to try something, adapt it and themselves until it works, and then continue to adapt as the world changes.

*Learning Alliances need an engine*

Successful Learning Alliances are those that emerge from existing systems and processes within a country. In the countries. If they are created solely because an outsider thinks they are a good idea, they are likely to fail. However, they do need champions: stakeholders with the energy, vision and resources to sell the original idea and then keep driving forward the process of innovation and subsequent scaling-up. Ideally these champions should be people for whom the work of the learning alliance is part of their everyday job, and for whom the success of the LA will also bring personal success.

*Learning, not planning, is the main focus of Learning Alliances – but space must be created for learning*

In practice, during the implementation of a learning alliance, most of the meetings and activities will focus on issues of planning, negotiation and implementation rather than on learning. But it is critical to overall success that space (intellectual and financial) is created to enable learning throughout the process. This means taking time to step back and review the process. It requires honesty and the space to be honest. Failures must be brought into the open and discussed openly. Making the learning component *the* focus of the processes requires good facilitators and committed stakeholders.

*Documentation, reporting and dissemination need a specific budget and time allocation throughout the process*

Usually a project or programme takes 2-5 years to complete, reports are compiled and a final workshop for “dissemination” terminates the process. In a Learning Alliance, the learning is done throughout the process, not at the end. For this to happen, documentation, reporting and dissemination should be properly allowed for and should ideally have specific human resources allocated to them. When documentation is everyone’s business it quickly becomes no-one’s!

## Section 4. Next steps and leading questions

The LA approach is relatively new to the water and sanitation sector. The experiences that do exist are at an early stage and have yet to be properly documented. Nonetheless, it is already possible to identify a number of issues that seem to be of particular importance and deserving of special attention in the future.

Much of the innovation that is carried out in the water sector does not revolve around new (in the sense of ‘never seen before’) technologies or approaches. Indeed it is arguable that Learning Alliances are not primarily appropriate for the sort of research that leads to absolutely new devices or ideas. LAs are better suited to situations where ideas and approaches that have been tried and found promising in one country or context are to be transported elsewhere. Where we know *what* the innovation is but not *how* best to apply it in a new context or location. The objective then is to pick and mix from existing ideas, tools and hardware to create locally valid approaches.

In this context, key questions for the learning alliance approach revolve around the *how* of introducing new information (books, reports, institutional models) or devices (pumps, irrigation technologies) and guiding the transformation of these initially alien ideas and objects into local knowledge. Which systems and structures facilitate the learning process? These questions lie at the heart of the learning alliance approach.

### ***Facilitation is crucial for Learning Alliances – but who should facilitate?***

Learning Alliances require skilled facilitators. But who should lead this facilitation process? Can the core members of the learning alliance also be its facilitators or do the inherent conflicts of interest mean that this task must be handed to someone else? Or should there be a mix in the facilitation team between advocates and true facilitators? An external facilitator with a good knowledge of the country context might be more appropriate for dealing with power struggles and conflicting interests. However, an internal advocate/facilitator may better provide the drive necessary to overcome resistance to change, and in the future will be there to continue as champion of the approach and part of the engine necessary to drive the scaling-up process.

### ***Learning Alliances need an engine but many potentially important stakeholders are currently disempowered – how can they be involved in the effort to gain capacity?***

LAs will only work with committed stakeholders but, in a period when the processes of decentralisation and capacity building are in their infancy in many developing countries, uncertainty and fear of change can make it difficult to find the right people in the institutions of national and local government. Since capacity building is central to LA development these shortfalls, particularly at intermediate level, can be a real threat to progress. For the present at least, empowered and dynamic stakeholders are more often to be found in NGOs, CBOs and donor project teams.

***Are learning alliances possible under current modes of project management, delivery and thinking?***

Much current development thinking is focussed almost exclusively on outputs and numerical targets, with only cursory and formulaic attention given to either quality or sustainability. This problem starts with the MDGs. For water and sanitation they are particularly problematic. As well as being expressed in purely numerical terms they are effectively disconnected from any poverty target. Implementing agencies, particularly external ones, aggravate the difficulties with their adherence to short term project approaches that limit risk and concentrate on input/output ratios. By and large they are chronically shy of becoming involved in anything that looks like an open ended commitment.

Can learning alliances work in a world of output focus, short term goals, and log-frames? Can project approaches be adapted to suit programmatic and long term thinking?

The answer to the first question is *no*, and implies a need for advocacy for funding of more enlightened approaches that take into account the quality of processes. To the second question there is no immediately obvious answer but it is important that one is sought in the coming years.

***Overcoming barriers to vertical and horizontal integration – do the benefits outweigh the costs?***

In almost every sector, in developing and developed countries, there is a call for more/better integration. Moves in that direction are impeded partly by the high costs of communication and partly by the need for boundaries to any process. But there are other barriers to progress, arising from the nature of political power, particularly within centralised nation-states. One of the key questions for development generally is to what extent a combination of increased democratisation and decentralisation on the one hand and the IT revolution on the other, will provide the opportunity for genuinely decentralised, demand led and integrated service delivery and resource management.

For now it has to be assumed that progress can be made and in that sense the LA approach should be seen as part of the *how* of bringing about change. Nonetheless, if we are to learn from the lessons of past work on participatory approaches, great care must continue to be exercised in evaluating (and taking seriously) the costs as well as the benefits of greater integration.

***What is needed in an enabling environment for Learning Alliances?***

Learning alliances have evolved from the tradition of bottom-up, empowerment, action-research. In many ways they seek to extend the undoubted benefits of the empowerment that these approaches have brought to communities and other local level stakeholders through those working at intermediate and national levels. Those experiences have shown that several criteria will be key to making the LA model work effectively. They include: a link between policy, legislation and behaviour; a movement towards decentralisation; a sympathy to empowering people; an acceptance of bottom up and adaptive planning and management. Codifying the factors that are essential to the effective operation of LAs will be an important part of future work.

We expect to take further steps in the development of the LA concepts during the symposium on 'Learning Alliances for scaling up innovative approaches in the Water and Sanitation sector' to be held in Delft, the Netherlands, from 6-10 June 2005. The symposium will bring together practitioners and researchers from different sectors involved and/or interested in:

- practical experiences with scaling up innovative approaches through Learning Alliances;
- concepts and theory on Learning Alliances and their application in the water and sanitation sector;
- tools and methodologies for working through Learning Alliances.

With the papers and outcomes of the symposium, this working paper will be developed into a document for publication.

## Section 5. References, bibliography and further reading

### 5.1. Books, manuals, articles and papers

Leeuwis, C. and R. Pyburn (2002a) (eds.) *Wheelbarrows full of frogs; social learning in rural resource management*. Koninklijke Van Gorcum; Assen, the Netherlands

The central theme of this book is “social learning” for rural resource management. It provides conceptual insights and practical guidelines for planning and implementing development interventions, through a joint learning approach. It contains experiences from natural resources management, institutional development, agriculture and water and sanitation.

Lundy, M. 2004. Learning alliances with development partners: A framework for outscaling research results. In: Pachico, D. (ed.). *Scaling up and out: Achieving widespread impact through agricultural research*. Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), Cali, Colombia.

This book chapter describes the CIAT approach to Learning Alliances for outscaling research results. It provides also useful theoretical underpinning to the concept of Learning Alliances.

Restrepo-Tarquino, I. (2001) *Team learning projects as a strategy to contribute to the sustainability of water supply and sanitation services*. PhD thesis, School of Civil Engineering, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

This thesis describes and analyses the Team Learning Project (TLP) approach developed and followed by CINARA in a number of projects with partners. It shows how TLPs can link research and development at any level and thus prove to be a useful tool for strengthening the capacities of institutions and communities involved in WASH projects.

Röling, N. (1986) *Extension Science: Increasingly Preoccupied with Knowledge Systems*. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 25, 3/4 1985, 269-290.

This paper gives useful insight in the history of research, extension and uptake off innovations in the agricultural sector, and the lessons learnt. It shows the importance of thinking in terms of knowledge systems. Much can be learnt from analogies with the agricultural sector. However, one needs to remember that there are major differences between that sector and the water and sanitation sector, especially with respect to the role of (local) government. The paper also does not give practical indications for how to develop knowledge systems. Probably, this is one of the most accessible and least abstract papers written on knowledge systems.

Visscher, J.T. (ed.) (1997) *Technology Transfer in the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector: a Learning Experience from Colombia*. CINARA – IRC Technical Paper Series 32, the Hague, The Netherlands

This book argues that to enhance sustainability of interventions in the water and sanitation sector, a change is needed from technology transfer to technology sharing, through a joint learning approach. It provides the example of the TRANSCOL (Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia), in which CINARA (Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo en Agua Potable, Saneamiento Básico y Conservación del Recurso Hídrico) worked on scaling up a specific innovation (multi-stage filtration) within Colombia

and to neighbouring Andean countries. It gives both a theoretical review of approaches to technology transfer and sharing as well as the practical experiences of the programme.

## 5.2. Websites

### **Centre for Development of Training and Learning: action learning**

<http://www.cdtl.nus.edu.sg/link/nov2001/teach2.htm>

"Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." This website presents theories about learning and teaching

### **International Development Research Centre – Outcome Mapping**

[http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-26586-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-26586-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

This website gives an introduction to outcome mapping as a particular form of process documentation. It contains various on-line tools and sheets for that purpose as well as links to other reference material.

### **IRC Resource Centre Development programme**

<http://www.irc.nl/page/3381>

This website gives an overview of the IRC Resource Centre Development programme. It provides information about the rationale for Resource Centres and their role in the water and sanitation sector. In addition, it gives regular updated of activities of this programme between IRC and its partner RCs in different countries.

### **Royal Tropical Institute - RAAKS**

[http://www.kit.nl/frameset.asp?/specials/html/rk\\_kit\\_s\\_experience.asp&fnr=1&](http://www.kit.nl/frameset.asp?/specials/html/rk_kit_s_experience.asp&fnr=1&)

This website provides a broad collection of information about the RAAKS methodology and its practical application in a wide range of sectors. It provides also linkages to more resource material.

### **The Theory into Practice database**

<http://tip.psychology.org/index.html>

This database contains brief summaries of 50 major theories of learning and instruction. These theories can also be accessed by learning domains and concepts. Example: Double Loop Learning. There are four basic steps in the action theory learning process: (1) discovery of espoused and theory-in-use, (2) invention of new meanings, (3) production of new actions, and (4) generalization of results. Double loop learning involves applying each of these steps to itself. In double loop learning, assumptions underlying current views are questioned and hypotheses about behaviour tested publicly. The end result of double loop learning should be increased effectiveness in decision-making and better acceptance of failures and mistakes.

### 5.3. References

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## **Section 6. Annexes**

### **Annex 1 – IRC project experience with Learning Alliances**

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#### **Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia (TRANSCOL)**

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##### **Aim**

TRANSCOL (Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia) was implemented between 1989 and 1996. The original objectives of the programme were:

- The introduction of the Multi-Stage Filtration (MSF) technology in different regions of Colombia
- Training of staff in the introduction and use of this technology
- The promotion of working groups in each region to serve as multipliers
- Support to the development of CINARA (Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo en Agua Potable, Saneamiento Básico y Conservación del Recurso Hídrico) as a sector resource centre in Colombia
- The introduction and evaluation of community-supported water surveillance and control activities.

##### **Approach and structure of the learning model**

The main components of the approach were

- The development of an interdisciplinary team in Cinara to facilitate the activities in the regions
- The introduction of the project in the regions and to leading institutions and the regional governments so as to get political and institutional commitment
- The organisation of Inter-Institutional Regional Working Groups (IRWGs) comprising government institutions, universities and sometimes private sector organizations in the eight participating regions
- The development of two demonstration projects in each region

The IRWGs were to promote inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional teamwork and strengthen the capacity of (especially intermediate level) organisations in the MSF technology and participatory approaches. This was also meant to build the capacity of staff of the local authorities so that they would be able to fulfil a multiplier role. The demonstration projects were established to experiment with the technology and create the space for participation and collaboration between the institutions and the communities. This allowed for checking the technology against practical problems, converting the demonstration projects into learning projects (Quiroga et al., 1997).

##### **Impact and lessons learnt**

- The IRWGs proved to be an effective mechanism to create commitment among staff of local authorities and other relevant agencies to the new technology and approach and to create an environment for its upscaling.

- The learning projects proved to be a useful vehicle for capacity building amongst staff of the local authorities, other agencies and community members, in the planning, implementation and use of the technology.
- To date almost all MSF plants built under the programme are managed by water committees in the community and are still functioning
- The approach has led to a successful replication of the technology and methodology. In December 1997 a total of 50 MSF plants had already been built in Colombia (Visscher, 1997).
- The approach of learning projects has been developed and further consolidated into the Team Learning Project (TLP) methodology. Also, similar projects with the water utility of the city of Cali (EMCALI) have contributed to the consolidation of the methodology. An overview and discussion of TLPs can be found in Restrepo-Tarquino (2001).
- TRANSCOL provided the opportunity and the resources for CINARA to grow as a team, experiment with the technology and the methodology and build up its information and documentation centre. This contributed very much to the development of CINARA as a sector resource centre recognised nationally and further afield – the organisation is already working in other countries in the region.
- Leading the programme with support from IRC allowed CINARA to develop its skills in research, training and facilitation, but above all to build up a network with communities and local authorities as well as with a number of national level stakeholders and international organisations.

### **Reflection**

The TRANSCOL programme had many of the characteristics of a Learning Alliance. The shared interest was the scaling-up of MSF technology in Colombia. CINARA with its advisors, and in close collaboration with IRC, was the platform with decision making authority over the programme. They worked in collaboration with national institutions that co-financed the learning projects. For each of the regions CINARA established a team of two facilitators, one with a technical and the other with a socio-economic background. These teams facilitated the second level platform that was established in each region and made up of the different institutions involved in water supply in the region (policy, regulation, research, training and implementation). The teams together with key staff from the regional institutions also facilitated the third level platforms at the community level in each of the 18 participating communities. In general the latter comprised the water committees extended with interested individuals.

A very important factor in the success of the programme was the ability to adjust the strategy and the implementation schedule. Initially the programme was formulated with a three year term but, in close consultation with the DGIS (Directorate General for International Cooperation of the Netherlands Government), the leading funding organization, it was agreed to take a much more flexible approach. This gave time to search for and locate cheaper local resources for the construction of water systems, in turn leading to DGIS agreement to redirect the funds originally earmarked for construction to training and facilitation, allowing a much longer intervention by the teams from CINARA.

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**Women, Wellbeing, Work, Waste and Sanitation (4Ws) - Action research on alternative strategies of environmental sanitation and waste management for improved health and socio-economic development in peri-urban coastal communities in south Asia**

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**Aim**

Reuse of nightsoil and organic domestic waste in agriculture is an accepted and common practice in South-east Asia. This is, however, not the case in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka where waste is still mainly deposited on public land and in water courses. The potential to collect, recycle and reuse biologically degradable domestic wastes and reuse them in agriculture remains to be widely explored. Access to proper sanitation is low and sanitation programmes focus on containment and dumping and not recycling. Moreover, few peri-urban sanitation programmes use participatory approaches that are gender and poverty sensitive and create employment for women as latrine masons and in solid waste collection and recycling.

**Approach**

In this research, five universities and five NGOs from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, The Netherlands and Finland cooperate with Local Government in Action Research on Environmental sanitation in six peri-urban coastal settlements. The research has and will continue to compare the cost-effectiveness of existing programmes with that of innovative approaches that address the above mentioned gaps. More specifically, they will compare the cost-effectiveness of existing sanitation programmes and innovative approaches in local pilot interventions. The project has and will continue to assess and document the existing approaches, conditions and practices in six project areas and then introduce alternative ways to contain and recycle human excreta and domestic solid waste for rural-urban horticulture in three of these areas. No new interventions have taken place in the other areas, which serve as controls.

**Objectives**

- Measure the cost-effectiveness of technically, socio-economically and environmentally innovative and replicable approaches to excreta and solid waste management in low income peri-urban settlements in a part of Asia that has lagged behind in sanitation
- Measurably improve sanitation conditions and practices in six pilot areas
- Scale up the tested approaches through integration of lessons learned in sanitation policies and implementation programmes of Local and State Governments
- Strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation and implementation skills of the participating research and civic society institutions through knowledge exchange, cross-regional training and joint documentation of studies, interventions and results.

**Structure of the learning model**

The 4Ws partnership approach is an innovative approach which includes close collaboration of NGOs and Universities. At this stage the platforms at national, regional and village level are starting to be established. As this project is in the middle of its project cycle less can be stated regarding the ultimate learning model structures. As it stands currently, in the pilot communities, organisation and mobilisation activities were undertaken. All NGOs met with the local authorities to establish cooperation. In the pilot area in Bangladesh, a local NGO, Community Development Centre (CDC) is being involved. In Kerala, the NGO will work

through a local self help group. In Sri Lanka, the work will be done jointly by a local NGO, the Integrated Health and Environmental Organization, and three local group leaders.

The NGOs have had informal community meetings with local NGOs or CBOs, Area Development Association and Self-Help Groups, and formal meetings with the local authorities. In Bangladesh, A Project Management Committee has been formed, consisting of municipal functionaries (administration, health, and engineering) and CDC. Instead of the planned Voluntary Group, an Advisory Committee was formed. It has 23 members, representing a wide range of local expertise and leadership. One third of the members are female as is the Chair. In Sri Lanka, a regional and community-level advisory committee were established. The regional committee comprises functionaries from the local government, Ministry of Health and the local NGO. So far they have met four times and twice respectively. Mobilisation has resulted in the formation of fifteen small neighbourhood groups which play an integral role in the implementation activities

In September 2004, a meeting took place with the entrepreneurs of the local sanitary market in the Bangladesh pilot area, to establish a vending place for sanitary latrine parts. It was further agreed that the market will also employ local women. Technical and social workshops for orientation about the project took place in June in Alleppey, Kerala and on 19-20 November 2004 in Morrelganj, Bangladesh. In Sri Lanka, a technical and social workshop was held at two levels: first for the members of the Regional advisory committee and secondly for the identified key representatives of the Karukpone community.

By the end of this year a list of all the lessons learnt will be developed and reviewed. However in the meanwhile we hope that this background information has given the reader some indication of the work currently being undertaken and its larger role in building and sustaining learning alliances.

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## **EMPOWERS Partnership: a stakeholder dialogue for improved local water governance<sup>4</sup>**

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### **Aim and approach**

The EMPOWERS<sup>5</sup> Partnership is active in Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. It is facilitated and implemented by thirteen<sup>6</sup> organizations who have agreed to work together in a series of regional and national partnerships.

The aim of EMPOWERS is to improve water governance and long-term access to water by populations who currently experience scarcity and insecurity. It will do this through the following approach:

- Increasing the *influence* of different stakeholders, including end users, civil society and local government, on the planning and decision-making process for the use and management of scarce water resources. This will ensure that, at national and intermediate levels, planning and decision-making for IWRM will be better informed by local realities, leading to policy frameworks that support decision-making at lower levels.
- Enhancing *vertical and horizontal linkages and information flows*. Such linkages and flows between government agencies, local communities and others require that people and their organizations work together at different levels of influence and decision making.
- Demonstrating its approach through *pilot projects*. Through these pilots EMPOWERS will develop and test improved tools and approaches to planning in a hands-on learning process. In addition, it will build capacity, ownership and commitment at community and local government level, and bring the viewpoints of all those involved towards a shared vision and a common understanding of IWRM.
- *Documenting the learning process*. Documents and supportive videos describe the manner in which EMPOWERS has approached the issues at stake in the three countries, including lessons learned, bottlenecks, pitfalls, and how these have been resolved.
- *Sharing valuable information* and knowledge at regional level. In addition to approaches at the country level EMPOWERS will assume a role in regional networks, focusing on the wise use and management of local water resources in the Mediterranean Region.

### **Structure of the learning model**

The EMPOWERS Partnership approach adopts something close to a pure learning alliance model to scale up the innovative approaches to developing IWRM frameworks and participatory water governance at local level.

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<sup>4</sup> This section is based on information that can be found on EMPOWERS (2004).

<sup>5</sup> EMPOWERS is initially funded by the European Commission in the framework of the MEDA Water programme, CARE International, IRC and PSO, a Netherlands organization for capacity building in developing countries.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Agriculture - Water Department, Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management, and CARE Jordan (Jordan); Palestine Hydrological Group, Union of Agricultural Work Committees, and CARE West Bank/Gaza (Palestine); Development Research Technology & Planning Centre at Cairo University, Social Planning, Analysis and Administration Consultants, National Water Research Centre of the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egyptian Water Partnership and CARE Egypt (Egypt); IRC (the Netherlands); and CARE International (USA, UK and NL).

Platforms at regional, national, district/governorate and village level have been created and are supported and facilitated by multidisciplinary regional and national teams. The stakeholders involved include: end-users (both women and men) in nine selected pilot communities, NGOs, CBOs, government institutions (covering water, irrigation, local government, agriculture, health and environment) and relevant private sector agencies. The national and district processes are facilitated by three to four person teams consisting of national NGO, government, and university partners.

At national level a Steering Committee including line ministries and national research institutes ensures that the approaches being piloted meet national norms and expectations and ensures that results are fed into national policy.

### **Lessons learnt**

- Setting up teams and country partnerships is time consuming and requires great care and thought. Issues to consider in setting up the teams and partnerships include:
  - The need to have, in each team, a set of different skills (technical, facilitation, communication)
  - The need to link to existing networks and initiatives.
  - The need to identify national level partner(s) with the potential to become champions of the approaches developed and ensure their being taken to scale
- There is a strong need to develop, particularly at intermediate level, a learning environment which encourages local level experimentation and lesson learning. Again, this is time consuming and requires great care – people used to implementing orders from above can be intimidated by the freedom of being asked to innovate.
- Capacity building of partners at all levels is needed in order to develop interest and commitment to the process, and to provide the skills needed to innovate effectively.
- Identifying a long term institutional home for the capacity created, and particularly the capacity to facilitate the planning processes being developed, is crucial to longer term sustainability.
- Breaking down barriers between sectors and levels by facilitating dialogue and information sharing is an empowering process that has led to great excitement in the districts, governorates and villages where the approach is being piloted.
- Involving national government has been essential in making local government and line ministries feel comfortable with innovating and trying new approaches.

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## **The BUS initiative: between multi-level stakeholder platforms and learning alliances in an urban environment<sup>7</sup>**

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### **Aim**

The BUS initiative is one of the components within the UN-HABITAT (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP). It aims to support local governments and their partners in the provision of sustainable basic water and sanitation services to the urban poor. Specific attention will be given to innovative processes of participatory planning for these services and appropriate technologies.

### **Approach and structure of learning**

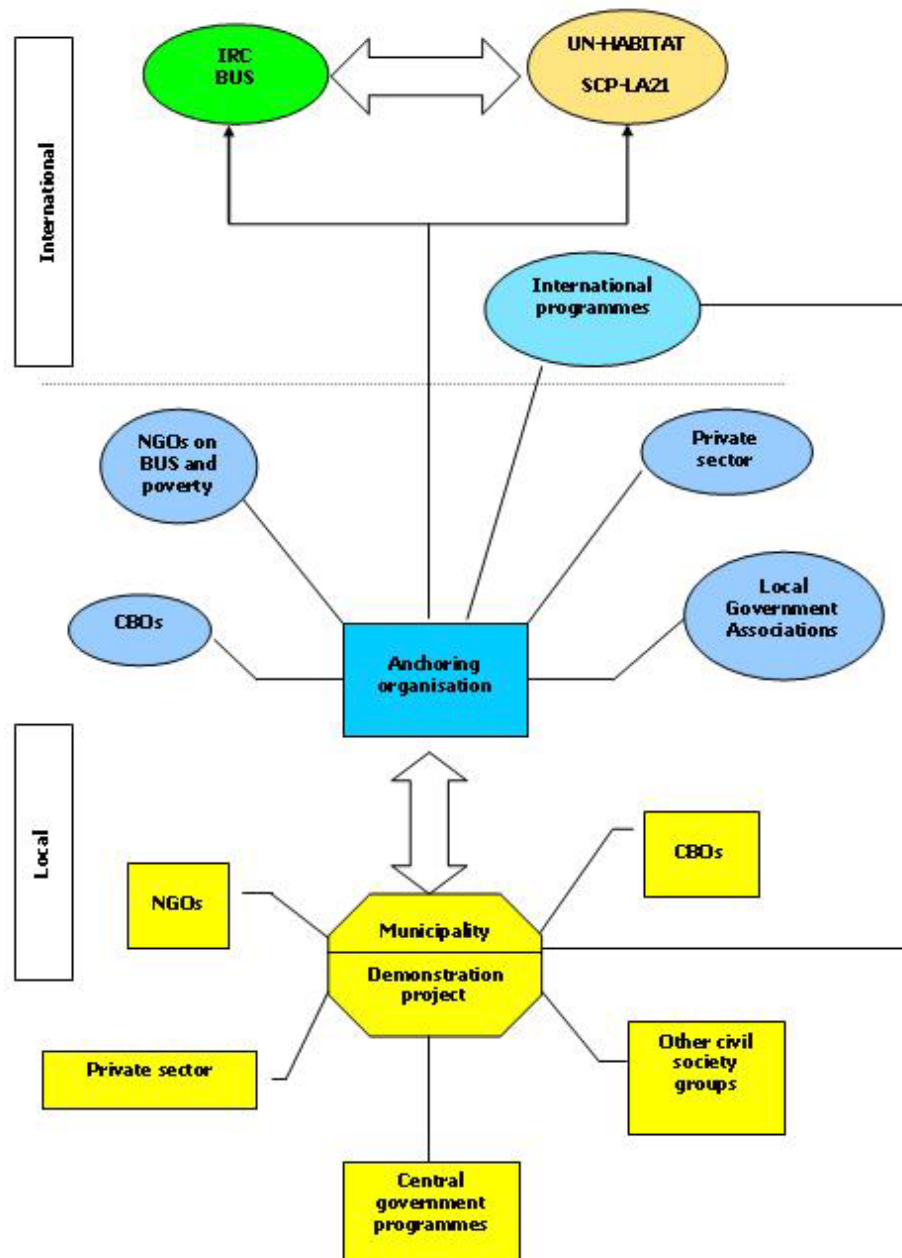
The three components of the approach are:

- **Demonstration projects.** These are the testing grounds for the BUS approach. Methods for stakeholder participation in planning and appropriate technologies which will be subject to testing and learning. Currently demonstration projects are carried out in neighbourhoods of Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) and Colombo (Sri Lanka). At those sites, local level (in this case not a district, but a neighbourhood) multi- stakeholder platforms have been set up for planning basic urban services.
- **Information and Documentation Strategy.** This will ensure the production of appropriate capacity building tools, the adequate documentation of the participatory process undertaken as well as lessons learned from the BUS approach, regular exchange of ideas and the promotion of alternative channels for information exchange.
- **Regional Anchoring Strategy.** So-called Anchoring Institutes (AIs) play a key-role in the initiative. In the first place these form the connection between local activities and global support of SCP. Secondly, they play a role in facilitating the process at local level. Thirdly, they will ensure the necessary capacity for sustainability and continuity. The anchoring strategy consists of strengthening regional and national capacity building organisations in their role as information clearing houses, developing BUS-focused training activities and programmes, and facilitating advocacy efforts. The figure below presents a diagram of the institutional relationships in the programme, related to the anchoring strategy. The active networking expected between the national anchoring organisations is intended to support the dissemination of local experiences at regional levels.

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<sup>7</sup> See (IRC 2004b) for more information





**Figure 3: Anchoring institutes in the BUS initiative**

**Lessons learnt and impact**

- The experiences of Kotte Municipal Council and Wattala Urban Council, in Colombo, can be considered to be somewhere in between multi-stakeholder platforms and Learning Alliances. Through joint learning between inhabitants and representatives of the local authority and NGOs, technologies for domestic and solid waste management are being

scaled up from household to neighbourhood level. At the same time these learning units are the platforms for planning, prioritising and negotiating those services.

- The AIs play a role in catalysing the LAs. Although the initiative does not as yet include national level platform representatives of line Ministries other national level stakeholders have actively participated in the local level platforms. It is hoped that the lessons learnt will feed back into national policies, so that scaling up to national level can take place.
- Because of the characteristics of an urban environment much impact can already be made through scaling up from one neighbourhood to others within the same urban centre. Flexibility is important in selecting the scale and level at which LAs are being established, depending on the type of environment and the institutional context.

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## **The Multiple Use System (MUS) project: learning alliances and action research on multiple use water services<sup>8</sup>**

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### **Aim**

The goal of the MUS project is to improve poor people's food security and health, reduce unpaid workloads, alleviate poverty and enhance gender equity. It is to be done through more effective use of small-scale water supplies and by generating and testing models, guidelines and tools for sustainable multiple-use systems that are financially affordable to the poor. These outputs will contribute to a further up scaling of the multiple use approach after the project is finished. The project will be carried out in 5 major river basins: Bolivia and Colombia in the Andes; Ethiopia in the Nile basin; India in the Indus/Ganges basin; Thailand in the Mekong basin and South Africa and Zimbabwe in the Limpopo basin.

### **Strategy**

The project aims to meet its goal by combining action research with capacity building. The action research will focus on developing and testing innovative models, guidelines and tools for planning, implementing and managing sustainable multiple-use water services.

At the same time the project will engage, inform and strengthen the capacity of project partners and professionals from the domestic and productive water sectors to scale up the more integrated approaches to water services at the local level.

Action research and capacity building will be carried out in Learning Alliances in which stakeholder participants are committed to collaborate with institutions and other initiatives on the issue of multiple use water services. Learning Alliances will be formed at both national and local levels. The Learning Alliances in the focus countries will hold regular meetings and undertake joint activities including research, documentation and advocacy.

### **Lessons learnt and challenges ahead**

At the moment, no formal Learning Alliances have been established in the countries where the project is being carried out. However, the first steps are being made in applying the flexible framework presented in Section 3. Scoping exercises are being carried out, stakeholder analyses are being made and meetings are held with national and local level stakeholders. At the same time work is being done to develop a framework for the action research component.

Some preliminary findings include:

- There is a need to combine research programmes with implementation programmes. Research programmes normally do not have any (or at least limited) funding for real world implementation activities. Without having that explicit component in the project, or linking research programmes to implementation activities, it is difficult to field test innovations and build the capacity of implementing organisations. Nor will it lead to effective feedback into research.

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<sup>8</sup> As the project has just started, no further reference material is available. This text mainly draws upon draft project documents, and the project inception report (Penning de Vries et al., 2004).

- One needs to carefully think about the institutional “home” of a Learning Alliance. In many countries there are broad water and sanitation sector platforms, in which different stakeholders come together. They may vary from fully fledged Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs), to formal sector coordination committees, to more informal meetings between different sector organisations. Whatever the form, these often provide a more or less neutral meeting space for a (national) Learning Alliance. When these sector platforms have a more formal role they may actually provide the necessary political endorsement for a project such as MUS.

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## Scaling up sustainability of community managed rural water supply and sanitation services in Ethiopia<sup>9</sup>

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### Background and aim

Community management has become the favoured approach for implementing water supply systems in rural areas in developing countries. It has yielded significant results but has not been able to supply water on a large scale or secure long term sustainability of water supply systems, principally because, until recently, communities were expected to operate and manage their systems on their own. However they do need external support at certain critical points. Without that both the management organisations and the physical systems will quickly fall apart.

The exact shape of the external support for community managed water services must reflect context specific needs and possibilities. A learning approach is best suited to develop these institutional structures, capacities and networks. Without these, scaling up rural water supply is not feasible. The programme in Ethiopia aims to bring different stakeholders at different levels together in a three year programme to jointly design the structures, capacities and networks to scale up community managed water supply services.

The programme was formulated during a workshop on scaling up community management of rural water supply and sanitation in April 2004 in Addis Ababa. Some 40 people, representing different water sector organisations participated in this workshop for which the INGO Plan International and IRC had taken the initiative. The workshop was concluded with the formulation of a proposal for a 3-year action research programme to scale up community management in Ethiopia and the formation of a national steering committee to take the scaling up initiative further. With the support of Plan International the funding for the proposal was secured in July 2004. The programme officially started in August 2004.

### Approach and structure of learning

The approach taken follows an action research cycle of diagnosis, analysis, reflection and action. The programme has funds to carry out actions defined by the participating stakeholders. Actions can be as varied as setting up institutional structures, capacity building of district staff, a national advocacy campaign and construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure. The precise form of actions needs to come out of the joint diagnosis and discussions between the participating stakeholders. The actions will be tested in the *woreda* (district) of Shebedino, in Ethiopia's Southern Nation.<sup>10</sup> A programme team of three staff members will support the action research and learning process.

The programme works with learning platforms at different levels. At national level a Steering Committee has been established, chaired by the Ministry of Water Resources. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and WaterAid are the vice-chairs. Plan Ethiopia provides secretarial support. Other members of the National Steering Committee include bilateral

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<sup>9</sup> No official documents are available yet for this programme. More generic information on the concepts behind scaling up of community management can be found at (IRC 2004c).

<sup>10</sup> Regions or nations form the administrative level below national level. Ethiopia is a Federation.

donors, research institutes, international NGOs and local NGOs working in the water and sanitation sector in Ethiopia. A Technical Advisory Group supports the National Steering Committee.

At regional level another learning platform has been established. Members of this so-called Regional Steering Committee are the regional authorities, regional representatives of the ministries of Water Resources, Health and Finance and Economic Development, international NGOs and local NGOs and training and research centres working in the area. This Committee, also supported by a Technical Advisory Group, will guide and participate in the action research activities in the *woreda* of Shebedino and will also guide the work of an Action Research Team set up to conduct the research and implement actions in Shebedino.

The approach of steering committees at different levels offers an opportunity to test and scale up appropriate institutional support structures for community management in Ethiopia. Local solutions will find their way to national stakeholders, as must happen if innovations are to be scaled up from local to regional and national levels. Conversely, national experience and institutional and financial understanding must be fed back to the local level and national policies and ongoing programmes must guide local level testing. Just as the action research is a cycle of learning so too is the process of communication and feedback between the different levels.

Appropriate support structures, better informed policies and improved coordination are therefore the main targets of this programme.

### **Lessons learnt**

Although the programme is still young some lessons can be extracted from its constitution and early phases:

- There was a concern that the funding for the action research would not be sufficient to carry out the intervention “actions.” However, the experience in Ethiopia has shown that, with a clear structure for the Learning Alliance (in this case the Steering Committees), with clear targets and with support from a broad group of stakeholders, funding for interventions can easily be mobilised.
- Commitment and enthusiasm are necessary but not enough to build an effective Learning Alliance. Some basic conditions need to be fulfilled to make systematic learning possible. These conditions are, in the case of Ethiopia, provided by the programme team: funding for meetings, workshops, training and field work; technical support; organisation and facilitation of workshops and training; a secretariat; transport, etc.

## **Annex 2. A flexible framework for establishing and working with Learning Alliances**

From the existing experiences with Learning Alliances described in Section 3 and Annex 1, we have devised a framework for the process of establishing and working with LAs. The tables in the following pages seek to set out in a succinct form the main generic ‘steps’ that will need to be gone through in the process. The tables are intended as a conceptually grounded but flexible framework to guide the process of establishing learning platforms at different levels; they are not intended to be followed mechanically from start to finish.

The processes to be initiated and supported should be dynamic, flexible and chaotic (in the true sense of the word – i.e. unpredictable and subject to sudden change). The ‘steps’ in the tables should be seen as markers or waypoints within a system that could start from several different points and follow several different routes, but in which most of these markers will have to be visited at least once. For example, the illustrated flow is from national to local level. That might be applicable in some instances but it would be equally valid to start at the district or community level if, for example, an implementing partner was already involved in work there.

The essential is that, wherever the start, the Alliance is soundly constructed of several linked learning platforms at different levels, offering the ability to quickly scale up innovations.

In using this framework to develop plans for a specific project it will therefore be important to adapt the current steps and their order into some sort of planning framework (a Gantt chart for instance), indicating clearly the starting point and level and the expected order and timing of the other steps.

In terms of a vision of what a guideline may look like by the end of a project, ideally it will be a sort of ‘toolbox’- electronic or printed – in which the table provides the framework, and in which the tools, outputs, activities and objectives have been validated and updated. It should be accompanied by case studies from projects (in the different basins, for instance), based on the process documentation; successes, failures, lessons learned etc. An electronic version will allow a user to click on – for example – a tool, and then pull up a fact sheet that talks them through how to use that tool, with the fact sheet in turn linked to a case study in which it has been used.

<i>National level</i>					
<i>Step</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Tools<sup>11</sup></i>	<i>Outputs</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Step 1: Scoping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To come to a clear agreement as to the boundaries of the theme to be dealt with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion within core partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short (1-2 page) description of theme – suitable for use in working with stakeholders in steps 2 and 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The discussions at district level normally start from innovative work that people may want to scale up.</li> <li>• At national level it is about identifying the ‘innovation’ to be introduced to a country. In some cases, a broad theme may be identified, e.g. Integrated Water Resources Management. This may be broken down in a number of specific innovations with the different stakeholders.</li> </ul>
Step 2: Mapping stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To know who is somehow engaged with the theme defined earlier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial stakeholder mapping exercise (likely to be repeated in next step)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The functional matrix (see Section 5)</li> <li>• RAAKS (Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems) tools<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An initial list of likely stakeholders who may be approached to join the national LA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that the different types of functions are represented (see Table 1)</li> <li>• Normally, one could target the line ministries and national organisations from whom the district organisations depend.</li> </ul>
Step 3a: Creating interest in a national alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reach agreement on the common objective of the LA</li> <li>• To create interest</li> <li>• To fine tune in the organisations that are members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder workshop</li> <li>• Institutional SWOT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SWOT</li> <li>• Sector scan tools</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial contacts can take place before the workshop.</li> <li>• If additional organisations are identified, a second workshop may be held</li> <li>• Good facilitation will be essential at this workshop</li> <li>• This may especially be the case when there are either blockages at national level (e.g. policy framework) to take the innovations forward, or when there are good opportunities to take innovations forward at national level (e.g. certain donor or national programmes).</li> <li>• In most cases there will be a need to have a National LA (NLA)</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Discussing each of the different tools goes beyond the scope of this paper. References for more information are given to tools that are not “commonly” used.

<sup>12</sup> RAAKS is a methodology that has been designed and tested to help stakeholders gain a better understanding of their performance as innovators. For more information see (Royal Tropical Institute 2004). It has originally been developed by (Engel 1995).



<i>National level</i>					
<i>Step</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Tools<sup>11</sup></i>	<i>Outputs</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Step 3b: Formalisation of the national alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify the commitment of member organisations</li> <li>• To form a working group to take the process forward</li> <li>• To establish the scope of activities</li> <li>• To identify roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with key stakeholders to follow up 3a and formalise the terms of the alliance</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terms of reference for the Learning alliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some cases it may take the form of a National Steering Committee.</li> <li>• It may be necessary to have a secretariat with the National Steering Committee.</li> </ul>
Step 4: National process scoping and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping of national process finalised</li> <li>• Structure and boundaries of learning and implementation process agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project cycle tools – e.g. European Union Project Cycle Management (EU PCM)<sup>13</sup>, EMPOWERS project cycle<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work plan for the alliance including: clear frameworks for planning, design of interventions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For each step roles and responsibilities need to be defined, between the member organisations.</li> <li>• It is also noted that some activities, especially around policy development, may not have proper project cycles. Still it is important to know who does what and in what sequence</li> </ul>
Step 5: Identification of pilot district(s)/ area(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot district(s) identified and agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out initial district level discussions with key stakeholders to ascertain interest and suitability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection criteria</li> <li>• Stakeholder mapping</li> <li>• Water resources assessment (WRA)<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional ‘readiness’ report – describing enabling environment in district and assessing chances to scale up</li> <li>• Water resource assessment report describing current water resource and water development, identifying critical issues relevant.</li> <li>• Highlighting existing experiences with similar concepts in the district if relevant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The criteria may include: commitment of organisations in district, presence of representatives of national stakeholders in district, ongoing initiatives, etc.</li> <li>• In general, for scaling up, the criteria for institutional linkages should be the most important criteria.</li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> See (EC 2004) for more information.

<sup>14</sup> The EMPOWERS (Euro-Mediterranean Participatory Water Resources Scenarios) Partnership is developing a project cycle, especially aimed at integrating a local level IWRM (Integrated Water Resources Management) approach. For more information, see (Moriarty and Batchelor forthcoming). Within this project cycle a number of tools is highlighted.

<sup>15</sup> A water resource assessment is a systematic study of the status of water resources and trends in accessibility and demand within a specific domain of interest. For more information, see (Batchelor and Moriarty forthcoming).

<i>District level</i>					
<i>Step</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Tools</i>	<i>Outputs</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Step 1: Set up District Learning Alliance (DLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District learning alliance established</li> <li>• To reach agreement on the common objective of the LA</li> <li>• To create commitment</li> <li>• To develop a forum for implementation aspects of the LA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District level stakeholder workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The criteria may include: geographical conditions, ongoing initiatives, presence of stakeholders in the village, etc.</li> </ul>
Step 2: District process scoping and design		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District level institutional SWOT</li> </ul>			
Step 3. Project cycle at district level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To structure the learning and implementation process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DLA (possibly with pilot villages) and the NLA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least there should be clear frameworks for planning, design of interventions, implementation and monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The communities can already be part of this Step, so actually Step 3 and Step 4 may coincide (or not) depending on each situation.</li> <li>• For each step roles and responsibilities need to be defined, between the member organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that new planning and implementation approaches tailor as closely as possible with existing ones – and that where changes are necessary these are designed and are acceptable at both district and national level.</li> </ul>
Step 4 Identify pilot villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify potential pilot villages/ communities</li> <li>• To ensure interest of villages to the process</li> <li>• To have villages as members of District level platform</li> </ul>				

<b><i>Village/community level</i></b>					
<b><i>Step</i></b>	<b><i>Objective</i></b>	<b><i>Activities</i></b>	<b><i>Tools</i></b>	<b><i>Outputs</i></b>	<b><i>Remarks</i></b>
Step 1: Village level scoping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have identified: Major water uses/users</li> <li>Amount of water used/available (resource and supply) (quantity, quality, reliability)</li> <li>The main bottlenecks and opportunities</li> <li>To have assessed the likely impact on gender and poverty</li> <li>• To have developed/strengthened a village level platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder analysis</li> <li>• Participatory visioning/problem identification</li> <li>• 'light' water resource assessment to establish baseline of potential for innovation</li> <li>• Participatory action planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder mapping</li> <li>• Various EMPOWERS project cycle tools</li> <li>• WRA</li> <li>• RIDA (Resources, Infrastructure, Demand, Access)<sup>16</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Village action plans</li> </ul>	
Step 2: Village level implementation					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More details will be given in the guidelines for implementation and research</li> </ul>

<b><i>Recurrent activities at all levels</i></b>					
Ongoing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make sure that replication is ensured</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These include: action research, process documentation, short cycle dissemination</li> </ul>		

<sup>16</sup> See (Moriarty et al. 2004) for more information.

## **Contacts**

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