Learning Alliances

Scaling up innovations in water, sanitation and hygiene

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International Water and Sanitation Centre

IRC

Table of contents

List of abbreviations and acronyms

AKIS   Agricultural knowledge and information systems
AWARD   Association for Water and Rural Development
CAN   Andean Community of Nations
CARE WBG   CARE in West Bank and Gaza
CATIE   Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza
CBO   Community Based Organisation
CCTP   Core Councillor Training Programme
CGIAR   Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CG   Consultative Group
CIAT   Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical
     (International Centre for Tropical Agriculture)
CICDA   International Cooperation Centre for Agricultural Development
CINARA   Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo en Abastecimiento de Agua,
     Saneamiento Ambiental y Conservación del Recurso Hídrico
CMIP   Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme
CoC   Community of commitment
COP   Community of practice
CSO   Civil society organisation
CRS   Catholic Relief Services
CWSS   Community Water Supply and Sanitation
DBSA   Development Bank of Southern Africa
DPLG   Department of Provincial and Local Government (South Africa)
DRTPC   Development Research and Technological Planning Center,
     Cairo University,
DWAF   South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
EC MEDA   EU financial instrument for implementing the
     Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
EMPOWERS   Euro-Mediterranean Participatory Water Resources
     Scenarios programme
FONTAGRO   Regional Fund for Agricultural Technology
GTZ   Germany's Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
GWP   Global Water Partnership
IC   Intercooperation
ICM   Integrated Catchment Management
IDRC   International Development Research Centre
IMESA   Institute for Municipal Engineers of South Africa
INGO   International non-governmental organisation
INWRDAM   Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development
     and Management
IRC   IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre
IRWGs   Inter-Institutional Regional Working Groups
IWRM   Integrated water resources management

JLP	Joint Learning Project
JMP	Joint Monitoring Programme (of UNICEF and WHO)
JoHUD	Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development
KSP	Knowledge Sharing Programme
LA	Learning alliance
LEARN	Learning in Agriculture Research Network
MAAP	Multi-Annual Action Plan
MCC	Masibambane Coordinating Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MSF	Multi-stage filtration
MSP	Multi-stakeholder platforms
MUS	Multiple Use Systems
NaSCO	National Sanitation Coordinating Office
NCWSTI	National Community Water and Sanitation Training Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSTT	National Sanitation Task Team
O&M	Operation and maintenance
PHG	Palestinian Hydrology Group
PHILA	Post-Harvest Innovation Learning Alliance
PTD	Participatory technology development
PWA	Palestinian Water Authority
RAAKS	Rapid Rural Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems
RC	Resource centre
RHS	Regional Health Services
RURALTER	Inter-institutional Platform in the Andean Region
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SCOWSAS	Standing Committee on Water Supply and Sanitation
SDCA	Stakeholder dialogue and concerted action
SMMEs	Small and medium and micro enterprises
SNV	The Netherlands Development Organisation
SAAWU	South African Association of Water Utilities
SAICE	Southern African Institution for Civil Engineering
SANGOCO	South African NGO Coalition
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach programme
SWITCH	Sustainable Water management Improves Tomorrow's Cities' Health
TLPs	Team Learning Projects
TRANSCOL	Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UAWC	Union of Agricultural Work Committees
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WASPA	Wastewater Agriculture and Sanitation for Poverty Alleviation
WIN-SA	Water Information Network – South Africa
WHO	World Health Organization

WISA	Water Institute of South Africa
WRC	Water Research Commission
WSA	Water services authority
WSSLG	Water Services Sector Leadership Group
WSP	Water Services Providers
ZENID	Zein Al-Sharaf Institute for Development

x

Acknowledgements

A villager obtains water for his family and his cow in a village in Ananantapur district, Andhra Pradesh, India. Picture: The WHiRL project

Preface

It is widely acknowledged that new approaches are needed for communities to gain access to adequate and sustainable water and sanitation services and effective hygiene education programmes. Many sector approaches misfire or prove disappointing, and shared learning about these failures is often lacking. Likewise, there are numerous success stories, but most fail to break out of their project stage, and remain islands of success. Scaling these up remains a challenge.

This is not primarily about 'inventing' innovative technologies or ideas. Innovations need to be relevant and adopted in each country, region, district and community and those who introduce or use new approaches need to engage fully with them and apply their own creativity.

Learning alliances recently emerged in the water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector as a promising approach to problems of scaling up innovations; one that has already had some success in business and various areas of development, especially in agro-enterprise development. Learning alliances are about building the structures needed to bring people together to analyse and address problems, facing the challenge of mismatched expectations and interests, and jointly learning how to find solutions. They also aim to bridge the gap between people on the ground, organisations at district or provincial level with responsibility for service provision and support, and national policy makers.

In June 2005, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education hosted an international symposium to share the key concepts of learning alliances more widely in the sector, to exchange experiences and lessons and to discuss gaps in understanding. The symposium was itself a source of creativity and learning, both about some of the concepts around learning alliances and real life practical examples of learning in action. It was also an alliance of professionals in the water sector, with different backgrounds in policy making, implementation, research and capacity building.

The lessons and challenges have been developed further for this book to capture some of the conceptual discussion and the tensions that appear when learning and action are in motion. It examines case studies from Latin America, South Africa and the Middle East that show learning alliances in action. It therefore reflects some of the principal theory on this subject and some of the leading practice. It draws out lessons from these experiences and the questions and uncertainties that remain.

Learning alliances are not a silver bullet for the sector, and the concept and practice is still developing. The book is therefore a 'state of the art' report in an area where the art is in rapid motion, as witnessed by its increasing take up in new projects and programmes. Those who fund research have an interest in promoting it, to ensure that

research results are put into use. Practitioners see it as a way of developing systematic learning about their practice. Policy makers use learning alliance concepts to link policy making to on the ground experiences. This growing interest in the approach also results in more questions, many of them unresolved. IRC is committed to working with partners in taking this approach further, and sharing experiences to answer some of these questions. We hope that this book will inspire others to step into the alliance.

PART I: Introduction and key concepts

Khalifa Higgi, an official at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources of Oman, explains the results of a problem tree analysis around water resources management in one of the country catchment areas. The analysis was the result of joint work with colleagues.
Picture: Stef Smits

1. Scaling up innovations through learning alliances: An introduction to the approach

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Summary

The learning alliance (LA) approach is relatively new in the development sector but is recognised as having great potential for helping people and organisations to break through barriers to learning about innovations and to help innovations to spread more widely. It is being taken up in response to the need to scale up innovative approaches to WASH services delivery, recognising the different roles and mandates of stakeholders in innovation.

The potential outcomes are more effective and appropriate local innovations, as well as capacity development of sector stakeholders to sustain innovations and adapt and replicate them elsewhere. Taken together these ultimately lead to scaling up positive approaches and bringing better quality services to large populations who currently have inadequate water and sanitation.

A learning alliance is defined as a series of connected multi-stakeholder platforms at different institutional levels (national, district, community, etc.), involved in innovation in an area of common interest, and its scaling up.
A learning alliance is not a silver bullet but it builds upon a number of proven methodologies, such as stakeholder mobilisation, action research, process monitoring and dissemination and sharing. Applying these in a flexible way according to local needs and contexts requires strong process facilitation. This is also needed to overcome conflicts and the difficulties common to any partnership approach, such as domination by powerful stakeholders. When the whole package is put together in this responsive and creative way, something very powerful and effective begins to emerge.

Because learning alliances are relatively recent in the WASH sector, there are few consolidated experiences. This book describes the current state of the art of learning alliances in the WASH sector, and these experiences will be multiplied as the approach takes hold.

The book reviews theory and experiences from the agricultural sector, where some key concepts have had longer exposure, and presents initial experiences from the WASH sector. The book reflects on the lessons learnt about how learning alliance processes can be managed, as well as on the key concepts of the approach. Outstanding questions and gaps in knowledge are considered.

The book is divided in three parts. Part 1 contains an introduction with the rationale and key concepts (this chapter), the theoretical underpinning of the learning alliance approach (Chapter 2) and the historic development, with specific attention to the

agricultural sector (Chapter 3). Part II presents experiences from the WASH sector, from Colombia (Chapter 4), the Middle East (Chapter 5) and South Africa (Chapter 6). These cases show how key elements of learning alliances have been applied in projects and programmes. Part III reflects on important lessons and outcomes from these cases. It starts by analysing lessons on how the learning alliance approach can be followed and which methods can be used (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 reflect on the outcomes and key concepts of the approach, makes some suggestions for a way forward, and formulates a few outstanding questions. Full references for authors of the chapters are given at the end of this chapter.

Introduction

The challenges for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector are well rehearsed: 2.4 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation facilities and 1.2 billion people have no access to safe water supply (WHO/UNICEF, 2005); even where facilities exist, their use may be limited by water resources problems; in many areas water supply services are already affected by (local) over-abstraction of water resources (Moriarty *et al.*, 2004); in turn water and sanitation services may impact on water resources; for example, in Africa a negligible amount of wastewater is treated before being discharged into fresh water bodies; in Latin America this is 14% and Asia 35% (Scott *et al.*, 2004). Governments, NGOs, donors, communities and knowledge institutes are putting in efforts to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing by half the percentage of people without access to these services. That calls for new and innovative approaches to service delivery, which also consider linkages with water resources management. Although there are many cases of communities where such approaches have been applied, these often remain isolated islands of success. Replication, local adaptation and scaling up remain limited.

> **Box 1.1. Scaling up and scaling out**
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> The terms scaling up and scaling out are used in different ways by different authors. Harrington et al. (2001) refer to scaling out in the context of natural resources management as an interactive learning process to reach wide area coverage of a certain practice. The emphasis is on the process of multiplication with adaptation. Lockwood (2004), in his review of scaling up in the WASH sector, concludes that it refers both to reaching a wide coverage and to sustainability. Gundel *et al*. (2001) make a distinction between vertical and horizontal scaling up. The vertical axis refers to the institutionalisation of an innovation from community level to intermediate level actors, to national policy makers or donors. Horizontal scaling up is the geographical spreading to more people and communities, i.e. what Harrington et al call scaling out. Both institutionalisation and geographic spread are of importance to guarantee increased coverage and sustainability. In reality, the two processes are often difficult to separate, since geographical spread cannot take place without institutionalisation. In this book, we use the term scaling up for the combination of the two processes.

The reasons are manifold, but many are related to a failure to carry out innovation within an institutional structure that explicitly caters for its eventual ownership, uptake and replication. A growing number of development organisations (governments, NGOs and 'projects') apply participatory approaches in their work with communities, developing locally appropriate interventions. However, the focus often remains on the community in isolation. Other organisations and institutions, especially at the so-called intermediate level[1], are largely bypassed, often in the aim of achieving increased 'effectiveness'. Yet, these intermediate level organisations are critical for supporting communities in various ways. Local government supports communities with technical assistance, knowledge institutes provide training and access to information, and the private sector has a role in the supply chain for spare parts and other services. Bypassing intermediate level organisations may result in these functions not being fulfilled, leaving communities on their own and unsupported, putting sustainability at risk (Schouten and Moriarty, 2002).

This does not only have local implications. It also limits scaling up. Lessons learnt from community-level projects are often not properly consolidated or disseminated throughout the sector. Nor is sufficient capacity being built among intermediate level entities for them to innovate locally. Research organisations also develop promising innovations. However, research projects often use unrealistic levels of resources with no funds earmarked for collaborative learning or adaptation, so that intermediate level organisations are unable to replicate these approaches. In short, the wide range of organisations involved in WASH implementation, research and policy work in isolation, limiting the innovative capacity of the sector as a whole to respond to diverse needs and demands, identify key principles and scale them up (Moriarty *et al.*, 2005). The adoption of rope pump technology (see picture next page) illustrates the chaotic way in which innovations spread, sometimes successfully, but also with limitations.

There is also a long history (especially in the agricultural sector) of efforts to overcome this shortcoming, through action research, farmer learning and other interactive methodologies (Leeuwis and Pyburn, 2002; Chapter 2 and 3 of this book). These have given birth to the theory of knowledge systems (Röling, 1986) and agricultural knowledge and information systems (AKIS) (Röling, 1992). The key issue in this theory is that a set of actors, networks and organisations are necessary to support innovation and knowledge management processes. Innovation and scaling up require the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, as well as a certain structure to facilitate interaction. Stakeholders usually do not interact at the same institutional level nor with precisely the same objectives. At the same time, for innovations to be effective, change must take

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[1] We use the term intermediate level to indicate the level between national government and the communities. The exact administrative name for that level differs from country to country, and maybe called a district, a municipality, a governorate or a local council. Sometimes there may even be 2 or 3 tiers of intermediate level. By the term intermediate level we do not only refer to the local government entity at that level, but also to other organisations that may operate at that level, such as de-concentrated line ministries, local offices of NGOs, local knowledge institutes, and private enterprises, such as spare part providers.

Processes of scaling up and adapting technologies are fuzzy and complex. Rope pump technology has been known since ancient times. It was rediscovered in Nicaragua as a low-cost technology in the 80's, and was very quickly scaled up there. Since then, efforts have been made to introduce it into other countries. In South Africa, some pilots have been undertaken but scaling up lags behind. In Zimbabwe, it has been adapted into a variety of forms, fitting local needs, and is now being scaled up.
Pictures: Stef Smits

place at a variety of levels. This is reflected by Groot *et al.* (2002), who discuss the concept of working through multiple nested subsystems, in order to better focus and tailor needs in multi-actor learning. The learning alliance approach builds heavily upon these concepts and approaches, and the ideas of social learning more generally.

Learning alliances: origin and development

The term *learning alliance* has been in widespread usage in the business world since the end of 1980s (see for a review Iyer, 2002, and Khanna *et al.*, 1998). The term is also used in health and education; for example in the National Health Service in the UK (NHS, 2006). In all these cases, the concepts are similar to those elaborated in this book. In the development sector, the term is of fairly recent coinage.

The earliest references we can find are by the Colombian-based Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) who define LAs 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 *et al.*, 2005; and Chapter 3). CIAT follow this approach in their Rural Agro-

enterprise Development Project (Lundy, 2004; Lundy *et al.*, 2005; and Chapter 3) and advocate its use more widely in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) as a means of increasing the effectiveness and relevance of research, the impact of development work and better informed policies.

The definition of a learning alliance used by IRC in its work in the WASH sector, and as the basis for this book is similar to that used by CIAT, but in recognition of the layered structure of the WASH structure, it makes more explicit reference to platforms at different institutional levels. We define a learning alliance as "a series of interconnected multi-stakeholder platforms at different institutional levels (national, district, community, etc.), aiming to speed up the process of identification, development and scaling up of innovations" (based on Moriarty *et al.*, 2005). In this way, the LA approach aims to apply the theory of innovation systems to the WASH sector.

Although not using the term, the Technology Transfer Programme in Water Supply Treatment in Colombia project (TRANSCOL) (see Chapter 4; Visscher, 2006) was one of the first cases in which a number of key learning alliance concepts began to be applied in the WASH sector. Realising the limitations of conventional technology transfer programmes, this project developed into a multi-stakeholder learning project about community water supply treatment. It worked at community level in a participatory way, while at the same time involving support institutions in the project through Inter-institutional Regional Working Groups (IRWGs), which are essentially stakeholder platforms at provincial level. In Colombia the experiences and lessons learnt in TRANSCOL were afterwards taken forward and consolidated into Team Learning Projects (TLPs) (García *et al.*, 1997; Galvis *et al.*, 1999; Restrepo, 2001; and Restrepo, 2005).

Elsewhere, similar approaches started to emerge in the WASH (and broader water) sector, although with significant differences. One of the key changes was a more explicit attempt to define and establish platforms at different levels. As Chapter 4 explains, in TRANSCOL the national platform consisted of the two project implementing agencies alone. National stakeholders, such as representatives of Ministries responsible for water supply were only involved to a limited extent. The Euro-Mediterranean Participatory Water Resources Scenarios programme (EMPOWERS) moved away from this and developed a learning approach about local integrated water resources management (IWRM) at multiple levels (Chapter 5). In South Africa the learning alliance concept wasn't explicitly used in institutionalising learning into the water services sector, but many similar concepts emerged organically, especially the setting up of platforms at different institutional levels (Chapter 6). The Multiple Use Systems (MUS) project (Koppen *et al.*, 2006) is applying a learning alliance approach in eight countries around the world in very different institutional contexts. Platforms at decentralised and national levels have been established in various ways, with a view towards supporting locally relevant processes of innovation and towards creating an environment conducive to scaling up. These and other experiences triggered the need to conceptualise learning approaches in projects and programmes in a more developed way and marked the start of the use of the term *learning alliances* in the WASH sector (Moriarty *et al.*, 2005).

In response to this need, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education hosted an international symposium on this topic in June 2005 (Smits *et al*., 2005; McIntyre, 2005). This symposium brought together a range of participants from different backgrounds in the water sector. It helped further consolidating key concepts in learning alliances, as well as sharing practical experiences with the approach. This book is largely based on the experiences and discussions held there, both in the cases presented and in the conceptual points presented. The remainder of this chapter gives our current understanding of the key concept in learning alliances.

Key concepts in learning alliances

Learning alliances take a flexible approach towards innovation and scaling up. However, that does not mean that any form of partnership learning constitutes a learning alliance. A number of key characteristics define a learning alliance approach in terms of 1) its focus and structure, 2) the target outcomes, and 3) steps and activities undertaken. In each specific case, these characteristics need to be brought together in a flexible manner to develop locally relevant learning processes. In addition, these start to form a framework for analysing processes of innovation and scaling up. This section introduces these characteristics and identifies cases elsewhere in the book, where more details can be found. This section also provides a framework for reading the case studies presented in this book. Chapter 8 reflects on the usefulness and relevance of the elements of the framework, on the basis of these cases.

Conceptual framework

Moriarty *et al.* (2005) define a number of key concepts to characterise a learning alliance in the WASH sector. These can be split between the focus of the approach, and the defining elements. These are elaborated below, and represented graphically in Figure 1.1.

Focus

By definition a learning alliance focuses on two key areas:

• **Innovation** is the development of locally relevant and appropriate innovative improvements in WASH services delivery. Innovation is not limited to developing new types of technology, or new approaches to WASH services delivery, but also adapts and applies existing approaches in areas where they haven't been applied successfully before. A learning alliance thus focuses on mobilising knowledge to develop improved approaches.
• **Scaling up** refers to the combined process of institutionalisation and geographical spreading of innovations (see Box 1). A learning alliance not only focuses on developing local solutions, but also examines the capacities required to institutionalise innovations and take them to other geographical areas within its mandate.

Defining elements

• **Multiple institutional levels** – developing innovations for the WASH sector requires knowledge from different institutional levels (community, intermediate, national) to be brought together. Only, in that way, can it be assured that successful innovations become embedded in mandates and functions at every level. Or, to turn it around, innovations need to be developed and supported at different hierarchical levels (community, intermediate and national), so as to ensure institutionalisation at these levels. This is also required for each level to scale up an innovation to other areas within their mandates.

• **Multiple stakeholders and disciplines** – in the WASH sector a wide range of stakeholders (communities, local authorities, NGOs, knowledge institutes, private sector) have complementary skills, capabilities and mandates in the fields of implementation, regulation, policy, research and learning, and documentation and dissemination. Scaling up innovation processes requires contributions from these multiple disciplines to arrive at integrated approaches. Different skills need to be brought together to overcome limitations. For example, innovation without proper documentation and dissemination is not likely to be scaled up, implying the need for learning alliance members with skills in this field. But documentation without the experience from implementation won't yield results either. In short, a learning alliance is by definition a multi-stakeholder learning process.
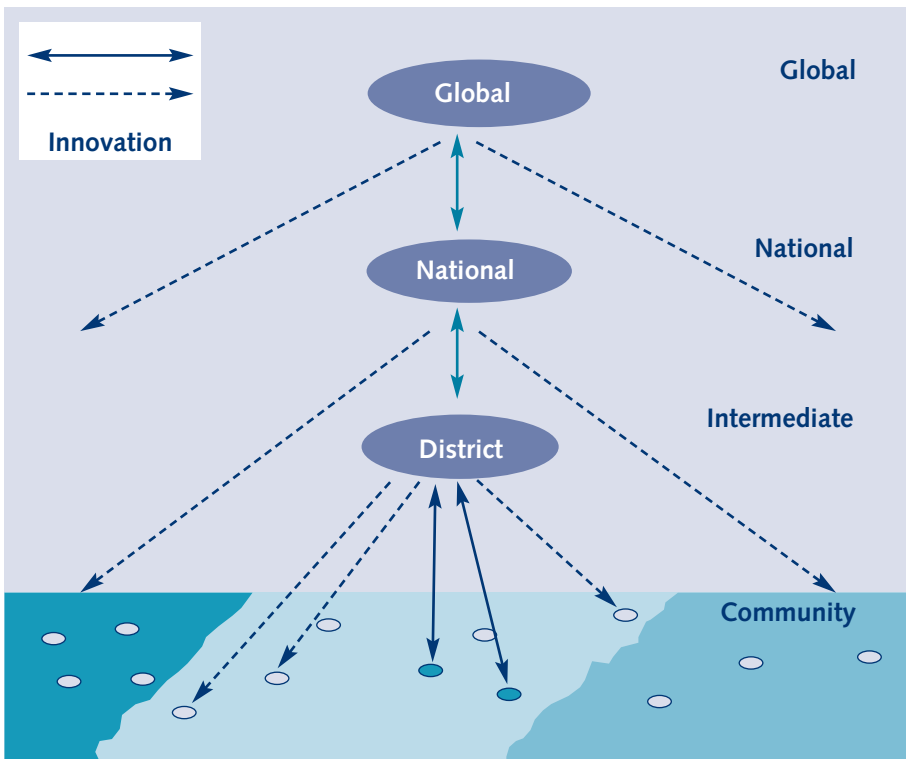
Figure 1.1. Conceptual diagram of a learning alliance

• **Facilitated platforms** – multiple stakeholders at multiple levels don't come together to innovate and scale up spontaneously. A facilitated space for innovation is required, where they can discuss, negotiate, have conflicts, learn etc. Likewise, it may be difficult to bring people from different background with different levels of power together in one single platform. In many cases, therefore a series of facilitated platforms is needed at different levels, with facilitated space for interaction between them.

The combination of the two areas of focus – innovations and scaling up – and the three key elements – multiple institutional levels, multiple stakeholders and disciplines and facilitated platforms – define what a learning alliance is about. These are the characteristics that enable it to be used as an analytical framework in analysing innovation systems in the WASH sector. Most experiences presented at the symposium and in this book address these concepts, either in their totality (Chapter 5) or partially (Chapter 4), and in a planned or unplanned way (Chapter 6). Chapter 8 analyses to what extent the expected benefits did indeed materialise.

Expected outcomes

The overall expected outcome of a learning alliance can be derived from its two areas of focus, the institutionalisation of innovations and their adaptation and replication to new contexts. But, scaling up may not always be directly visible, especially given the fact that local adaptation is needed. There may be three intermediate results:

• Effective and locally relevant innovations
• Scaling up the principles of innovations
• Strengthening capacity for innovation and scaling up.

Effective and locally relevant innovations
Collectively, stakeholders can achieve a more critical joint analysis of priorities and alternatives. The first result of bringing together stakeholder knowledge can be expected to be more effective and appropriate local innovations. Conventional participatory approaches often aim to achieve similar results. But conventional participatory approaches often do not involve stakeholders from the intermediate level, whereas these are crucial to the sustainability of interventions in the water and sanitation sector (Schouten and Moriarty, 2002). The involvement of a wider range of stakeholders at different levels is what makes a learning alliance different. These stakeholders help to develop interventions for which they feel ownership and for which they can provide the required institutional support.

Scaling up the principles of innovations
Ultimately, the aim of a learning alliance is that innovations are adapted and applied elsewhere. However, this does not happen according to a blueprint. A useful concept here is to look at principles which are inherent in many innovative approaches, and which can be adapted elsewhere to form a specific technological or organisational intervention, in line with the local context. A good example is given in the MUS project (Koppen *et al.*, 2006). In each of the eight countries, learning alliance members

develop ideas around the provision of water for multiple uses. The project team developed a number of key principles from multiple use innovations. For example at community level, these include livelihoods-based services, appropriate technology, financing mechanisms, institutional models and sustainable use of water resources, and there are other principles for an enabling environment at intermediate and national level. It is the principles which are scaled up, rather than the actual interventions. When the principles of innovation are successfully been scaled up vertically, this creates much better opportunities for innovations to be scaled up horizontally, i.e. to spread to other areas.

Capacity development for innovation and scaling up
In order to scale up innovations, changes in the capacity of stakeholders are often needed in two areas: 1) knowledge and skills related to the innovation and 2) skills and capacity for to adapt and replicate the innovation elsewhere.

The term capacity development is used for various kinds of processes. Chapter 4 shows how three levels for capacity development can be distinguished: 1) individual (skills, knowledge, motivation, experiences of individuals), 2) organisational (structures, processes, procedures, mechanisms, etc of organisations) and 3) institutional (policies, regulations, financial arrangements, and institutional arrangements). The LA process has the potential to address all three in different ways:

• **Individual level** – Individuals learn mainly by being involved in the activities mentioned above, and in this way strengthen skills and knowledge and expand their networks. They may require specific training or empowerment in order to engage with the process in the first place. In addition, specific content-related learning events may be specifically aimed at meeting their needs (see, for example Du Toit, 2005 for a framework of designing such curricula).

• **Organisational level** – It is anticipated that organisations that involve themselves in the learning alliance process will change their practices and procedures to sustain innovations and take them further. Often, this depends on the extent to which representatives who play an active part in the learning alliance are able to institutionalise new approaches in their home organisations, and the extent to which their organisations facilitate the process. These lessons are elaborated in Chapters 4 and 5. Only when organisational change occurs, can scaling up take place in an adaptive manner.

• **Institutional level** – This is arguably the most crucial level of capacity development, as it often requires changes in institutional relations to overcome barriers to innovation and scaling up. A learning alliance explicitly creates structures (platforms) where different organisations meet, and this helps to develop clearer relations, while other structural relationships may also be established. A side benefit may be the development of social capital and improved relations between organisations, in terms of accountability, coordination and cooperation. Chapter 6 analyses the interaction between learning processes and institutional change in the South African context.

Steps and activities

Many cases in this book detail steps and activities in the respective learning alliances. These show great diversity. This is in line with what Lundy and Gottret state in Chapter 3 that flexible, but connected, learning methods are needed and there is no blueprint. A step-by-step methodology would not be appropriate, given the range of contexts for which learning alliances may be appropriate, and to allow room for creativity. Yet, a fully open-ended process runs the risk of losing focus. Methodological robustness comes in the form of a number of generic learning methods, which need to be combined in a way that fits the local context. Weaving the methods together, as well as moderating between stakeholders, requires strong process facilitation. Attention also needs to be paid to the process of starting learning alliances. A more detailed analysis of these issues is given in Chapter 7.

Initiation

Multi-stakeholder learning processes do not begin spontaneously, but are often initiated by one person or organisation. In many cases, this is a relative outsider from a project, knowledge institute or government entity. In other cases, the initiation starts from an 'insider' close to the issue. However, an insider may not have a mandate for scaling up, or to work at other levels of scale. Good results can flow when an initiative by an insider catches the interest of a relative outsider with a mandate for scaling up.

The next steps may be the identification of the issue/problem and the stakeholders. These two steps often go hand-in-hand and occur simultaneously. A broad problem is identified, stakeholders are brought together around the problem and this leads to further refinement of the problem analysis. In other cases, stakeholders come together, define their problem and analyse which other stakeholders need to be involved. There is no clear distinction to decide whether LAs are problem-initiated or stakeholder-initiated. A final step which can be identified in most learning alliance processes is the definition of the objectives of the alliance; its vision, its value and modus operandi. All these are crucial for a rich and effective multi-stakeholder process.

Methodologies

Moriarty *et al*. (2005) identified a number of generic methodologies for use in a learning alliance process. These have been confirmed by the cases presented here and include:

- **Action research** – In the context of a learning alliance, action research is the process through which locally relevant innovations are developed and generic lessons relevant for scaling up are learnt. Action research builds the capacity of those who 'own' a problem for replication elsewhere. In the TRANSCOL project, people's water needs were addressed through developing and adapting water treatment technologies, which contributed to further insights about the technology (Visscher, 2006). Other cases (see Chapters 3 and 5) also applied action research methods.
- **Process monitoring and documentation** – Learning alliances aim to bring about change in development practice. However, not all stakeholders in the WASH sector are open to change, and some even resist it. Process monitoring and documentation is a systematic way to capture and analyse what is happening in a change process

and how and why it is happening. It provides a basis to take corrective action, if necessary, and to organise and disseminate the findings (Schouten, 2006 forthcoming). This method is being pioneered in EMPOWERS (Chapter 5) and documentation and analysis of change is also central to the learning process in the CIAT work (Chapter 3).

• **Dissemination and sharing** – This relates to the stage after research and documentation. Lundy and Gottret (Chapter 3) place strong emphasis on documentation, analysis and sharing of lessons. These feed back into the learning alliance as part of an action research cycle. Moriarty *et al.* (2005) state that in a learning alliance, a short cycle dissemination is of particular importance, making sure that lessons are shared as soon as possible to feed the learning process. More formal dissemination can take place at a later stage.

Process facilitation

Process facilitation is a key task and, as shown in Chapter 7, consists of a number of critical functions:

• Initiation of the learning alliance process; identifying and mobilising relevant stakeholders,
• Providing methodological guidance and overview; weaving activities together in a flexible and context-specific manner to form a robust methodology,
• Ensuring the participation and empowerment of all relevant stakeholders,
• Conflict management.

Process facilitation is not necessarily a task which lies with one organisation, or one person (the facilitator). Rather, it is understood as a set of functions distributed over one or more organisations. This is clearly shown in the case of EMPOWERS (Chapter 5). It is important, however, that facilitating organisations have legitimacy in the eyes of LA members to carry out this function. Local NGOs, especially resource centres (Lieshout, 2005), often have that legitimacy, as described in Chapters 4 and 6.

Conclusions

In recent years, the learning alliance concept has broken through in the development sector, including the WASH and broader water sector, to overcome limitations in innovation and scaling up, by explicitly working through platforms with multiple stakeholders at multiple levels. The concept is new, and there are, as yet, few well-documented experiences. This book therefore brings together some pioneering cases from the development sector, particularly applied to WASH, but also in the fields of water resources management and agriculture. It aims to contribute to a greater conceptual understanding of the learning alliance approach, as well as to offering insights into practical experiences.

The key defining characteristics of learning alliances are their focus on 1) innovation and 2) scaling up, and the fact that they are a) platforms of b) multiple stakeholders at c) multiple levels. The aim of learning alliances is to develop locally appropriate innovations and scale up the principles, as well as building capacity for innovation and

scaling up. They have a great potential to generate impact that is missing from the sector.

This chapter provides a framework for the cases presented in this book. At the same time, the cases assess these defining characteristics, analysing whether expected outcomes are achieved, and looking at the relevance of the defining characteristics.

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Dutch farmers discuss with a supplier penetration resistance in their fields in relation to the humidity of the top soil.
Picture: © PTC+ Horst, the Netherlands, www.ptcplus.com

2. Learning alliances between power and impotence: underpinnings and pitfalls from innovation and social learning theory

Jet Proost and Cees Leeuwis

Summary

Social learning comprises the process by which multiple interdependent stakeholders reach a negotiated outcome, resulting in collaborative action for sustainability. This chapter explores the concept of learning alliances to discover what links can be made between learning alliances and social learning. We assume that both concepts can reinforce each other in our understanding of technological and social change, and in scaling up processes of innovation.

Most definitions see social learning as emerging from, and being a condition for, a process of change, while an innovation is a collective achievement which cannot easily be scaled up. In a context where innovation is seen as a collective process of social learning, scaling up involves a flexible process of building networks, adapting to changing circumstances and emerging dynamics. Responsive planning, careful recording, mutual understanding and critical reflection are key issues.

Social learning needs to be regarded not as an instrument, but as a process strategy to support the emergence and 'redesign' of innovations. In this way, it can also support the development of learning alliances. A process perspective is essential, and a constructive social learning process needs careful facilitation. Several approaches to facilitation are discussed. The technical approach seems to be prevalent in water platforms, which may result in unsustainable outcomes. However, when reflection and learning are built in from the start of a program, and not only at activity level, experiences and insights can be made useful for future action and strategy. In this way of working the action/reflection cycle stimulates capacity building in learning alliances. Supporting learning is essential, but must be anticipated and integrated in (the facilitation of) wider dynamics.

Finally, some structural gaps have been identified, which need more attention and critical reflection in a learning alliance. These relate to the issue of setting learning agendas. The first is the issue of diagnosing problems and opportunities. The second is articulation of implicit uncertainties, knowledge claims and gaps in understanding. Finally, it is important to think about how to make learning agendas more relevant to the further development of the learning alliance concept.

Introduction

Learning alliances are a powerful concept for development programs in various sectors, like water and sanitation, agriculture, and small scale businesses. To overcome failures of previous development approaches, the learning alliance idea was

introduced, with the *learning* focusing on taking advantage of experiences, and on influencing research, donors and policy with the lessons learnt. The term *alliances* implies a network built with multiple stakeholders in a development program. These alliances are often seen as vehicles for scaling up of innovations, with social learning as the way to realise this ambition.

Coming from the agricultural sector and looking at what is happening in the water and sanitation sector, the authors see a number of resemblances in the way that both sectors pursue effective and sustainable development. These include the integration of functions, public funded collaboration between technical experts and end users, the need to match new technical devices with changes in the social realm, and the wish to embed such socio-technical innovations in existing institutions which have the relevant mandate.

Our thinking about learning and learning alliances is influenced significantly by changes in innovation theory. Innovations are no longer regarded as consisting only of technology, but rather as successful combinations of 'hardware' (i.e. new technical devices and practices), 'software' (i.e. new knowledge and modes of thinking) and 'orgware' (i.e. new institutions and forms of organisation) (Smits, 2002). In Dutch water management, for example, it is no longer enough to bring in new technologies to control water levels. To be effective, they need to be complemented by new institutional bodies and legal agreements regarding ownership of technical infrastructures and the division of responsibilities in operating them, as well as by new mechanisms for paying newly emerging water managers (e.g. farmers) for their services.

Dutch farmers study a map with regional water board plans for their catchment. To improve water conservation farmers collectively install and manage on-farm weirs. Picture: © PTC+ Horst, the Netherlands, www.ptcplus.com

Thus, innovation depends essentially on effective collaboration, including new forms of coordinated action, in a network of interdependent societal actors, and is a collective achievement rather than the result of individual 'adoption' (Leeuwis, 2004).

Such innovations require support processes to build networks, develop shared visions and understandings, articulate and match the demand for and supply of knowledge, achieve conflict resolution, and design collaborative innovation. An important challenge is that one cannot simply transfer or 'spread' from one context or network to another socio-technical innovations that have been developed through an elaborate process. One may transfer basic ideas or building blocks, but without the process of reaching agreement in the new network of stakeholders, innovation is unlikely to happen. In our view, this is why so many efforts to scale up innovations lead to disappointment and failure; all too frequently efforts are directed to scaling up a 'product' or a structure rather that scaling up a 'process'. It is the process of change and innovation that should be scaled up, accompanied by supporting conditions. Understanding the process is a prerequisite for scaling up, and insights from social learning theory can be helpful in this respect.

The learning alliance approach aspires to bring scaling up into the development process as much as the innovation itself, while social learning comprises the process by which multiple interdependent stakeholders reach a negotiated outcome, made concrete in collaborative action for sustainability. In this chapter we explore the concept of learning alliances and compare them with the ideas of social learning, to discover what links can be made and how processes of innovations can be scaled up. We hypothesise that these concepts can reinforce each other in our understanding of technological and social change, and that we can learn from one another to avoid pitfalls and make good use of successful insights and experiences. Bringing together concepts of learning alliances and social learning contributes to answering the central question of the International Symposium on Learning Alliances, (Delft 7-9 June 2005): *what makes learning alliances a powerful idea?*

Learning alliances

Moriarty *et al.* (2005) define a learning alliance as "a series of connected multi-stakeholder platforms, created at key institutional levels, 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" . In this model, stakeholders are interested in innovation, willing to share information and generate knowledge, and are aiming at an implicit goal to scale up the successful experiences. Each platform groups together various expertise and complementary capabilities in the field of project implementation, regulation, policy and legislation, research and learning, documentation and dissemination. As well as being seen as a programme management approach, Smits *et al.* (Chapter 1) state that a learning alliance can be seen as an analytic tool to find out about the sustainability and scale of innovations.

Lundy *et al.* (2005) stress the learning function of learning alliance, bringing together researchers, development workers, donors, policymakers and private enterprises. The premise is that enhancing learning in this group of stakeholders will improve the effectiveness of development programs and lead to a more rapid and effective innovation process. While Moriarty *et al.* (2005) focus on the structural elements, Lundy and Gottret highlight in Chapter 3 the process elements, which include identifying, sharing and adapting good practices in research and development in specific contexts. For them the learning alliance concept also promotes synergy among actors. LAs are seen as vehicles for collaboration, "helping to highlight and develop solutions to problems that may appear intractable to individual actors" (Lundy *et al.*, 2005: 1).

Three distinct phases are identified in the process design: (1) reviewing the framework, (2) implementing strategic actions and (3) documenting and analysing results. The three phases compose a double loop learning cycle according to Lundy *et al.* (2005). In the first phase of the cycle, participants formulate questions which frame the development process and which need resolving. In the second phase, capacity building is an important element alongside the identification of islands of success, in other words, positive examples of lessons learnt. Finally, in the third phase, participants use a virtual learning platform to reflect on the innovation. However, the three phases as described by Lundy *et al.* (2005) are less clear about reflecting on the learning process itself, which is what makes a true double learning loop. It is more focused on finding out what works and what does not, than on the team process, including the core values and ground rules.

But how do learning alliances come into existence? Is a learning alliance a thing or structure, that we can design and create, or is it supposed to emerge from purposeful collective action? LAs are said to represent an integrated approach, but where is the integration? Does it lie in bringing stakeholders together, sharing information, developing local knowledge to support local solutions, or is it about learning the way out of problems in a process of identifying and exploring the various epistemologies (Hubert *et al*, 2005)? Or are we talking of integrated learning, taking aboard cognition as well as emotion?

Let's first look into the concepts of social learning.

Social learning

As explained in the introduction, the term 'social learning' is meaningful for us in the context of changing ideas on innovation. In line with the idea that innovation is about effective collaboration in a network of actors, and requires changes in 'software', Leeuwis defines social learning as the process of arriving at complementary mindsets (or 'reasons for action') in a network of interdependent stakeholders (Leeuwis, 2004). Similarly, Röling (2002:35) defines social learning as "a move from multiple to collective or distributed cognition". In the case of 'collective cognition' coordination is forged primarily through shared perceptions resulting in and from collective action.

The idea of 'distributed cognition' recognises that stakeholders may well work together and engage in complementary practices while significant differences in perception remain. In a somewhat different vein, Woodhill defines social learning as a process by which society democratically adapts its core institutions to cope with social and ecological change in ways that will optimise the collective well-being of current and future generations (Woodhill, 2002:323). In this understanding, social learning should build on local level processes of community participation and involve a heterogeneous set of actors.

According to the LEARN (Learning in Agriculture Research Network) Group, an international network of social researchers in agriculture and rural development, social learning refers to a convergence of goals, criteria and knowledge leading to agreement on concerted action among interdependent stakeholders. It occurs where resource dilemmas have arisen: co-creation of knowledge is needed to understand issues and practices and changes in behaviours, and norms and procedures arise from mutual understanding of issues (Cerf *et al*, 2000).

Over the years various definitions of social learning appeared, and even can be clustered in schools such as systems social learning, and participatory learning. According to Blackmore what constitutes social learning depends mainly of the way the concept is theorised (Blackmore, 2006). This may explain the great variety of visions on social learning and how it can help to realise ambitions in situations of change. The question *what makes learning alliances a powerful idea?* is thus strongly related to the way how learning is conceptualised and who initiates the learning.

Most definitions see social learning as emerging from (and a condition for) a change process, and an innovation as a collective achievement which cannot easily be scaled up. It becomes essential to think about ways in which the process to arrive at coordinated action can be scaled up. Scholars from the social learning tradition are challenged by understanding and articulating the dynamics of learning. And because learning is theorised in many ways, this has implications for practice and the way learning is incorporated into the design and set up of development programs.

The *social* in social learning refers, in most definitions, to the social relationships between the stakeholders and to the methods of creating dialogue and bringing people together in platforms. Social learning develops standpoints by undertaking action and dialogue, both about the social and the content aspects. In this view both cognitive as well as emotional factors are implied in a change process. And here lies an important difference with learning alliances, which seem to focus mainly on cognitive components, changing realities according to intentional and rational standards.

Looking into the various descriptions of social learning, three process elements seem to be central:

- **Building networks** – Building networks has been recognised as one of the most important elements of social learning that occurs in innovation processes (Leeuwis, 2004). Connectivity is part of this network building process, because networks cannot just be put in place. People develop and build new relationships over time, both in terms of the parties involved as well as in terms of content (Engel, 1997). In strategies for social learning and innovation processes, networking among multiple stakeholders around collective action is a key element. Often the shared action defines the network. The notion of connectivity between networks and creation of interfaces is also important in discussions about scaling up innovations. For example, a Dutch case in regional water management showed that cross scale relations and networks are essential in scaling up the use and maintenance of technical devices for water retention (Proost *et al.*, 2004; Proost, 2006).

*Dutch farmers check and discuss the humidity of different soil layers
Picture: © Marcel Bekken, www.debeeldkuil.com*

- **Negotiation** – In most processes involving interdependent stakeholders, there is no single common agreed result that everyone is trying to reach. Innovation implies changing the status quo, which is always accompanied by friction and tension, especially when innovations go beyond simply optimising results within established frameworks and goals. Negotiation and conflict management are important areas of attention, and social learning can be seen as a process that improves the quality of this process. Getting to the point where everyone says 'yes', may imply participants losing something, as well as gaining. Part of the dynamics in a social learning process in this respect is the clarification of standpoints and expectations. There is an interesting difference between authors in how this is done. For instance Hunter uses the term alignment ("*all aboard, let's go*") leaving room for diversity and new creative options, and others like Senge opt for an agreement before proceeding ("*yes, ok, this is the way to go*") (Hunter, 2003, Senge, 1996). It takes time for

people to align and the interactions in doing so are very useful, because people explore each other's views. For the group process to be effective, it is essential to agree a common intention. In a process where there is no established co-operative aim, achieving some consistency of intention amongst participants is the point of departure. However, striving for agreement at too early a stage may create more tension in this explorative phase when people may still in 'negotiation' mode.

- **Learning while doing** –One of the challenging results of the work of the LEARN group in studying processes of change in agriculture and rural development in Europe was the notion that in many cases stakeholders did not act on the basis of problems they perceived, but acted from the ideas they shared about a negotiated outcome. In some cases a shared sense of urgency provoked by an interruption of daily life and work motivated people into action. However, rather than trying to define the problem(s) and identify solutions (the old approach), these groups decided to go together for something that might be completely new and different. While interacting, participants develop a way of collaborating, within an accepted set of rules, creating mutual trust and revealing interdependencies. This is a process of development rather than design, and can create a feeling of discomfort with technicians who like to have a design and plan before going into action. It is important here to keep in mind Kolb's (1984) idea that learning occurs from a continuous interaction and iteration between *thinking* and *action*, and that both can serve as entry points for making progress.

Various authors list preconditions for social learning, such as:
- Sense of urgency
- Feelings of interdependence among stakeholders (all parties need something out of the negotiation to achieve their goals)
- Stakeholders organise themselves for negotiation, implying meetings and other opportunities for interaction
- A degree of confidence that a negotiated outcome satisfying to all parties will be reached
- A degree of institutional space to implement outcomes
- Accepted leadership of the process
- Process facilitation
- Reflection built-in from the start.

These preconditions do not seem to be specific only for social learning; they are also appropriate for learning alliances. So, let's make a comparison between the two.

Making the connection

What learning alliances and social learning have in common is the process orientation in which learning and innovation are combined. However the conceptual thinking about this combination differs.

Conventional adoption and diffusion research does not look at, or seek to explain coordination between interdependent actors, according to Leeuwis (2004). The adoption of innovation is portrayed as an individual act. Recent literature provides evidence that successful uptake of innovations is often dependent on many factors inside as well as outside communities. New forms of coordinated action and cooperation are required, with actors who are not direct beneficiaries as well as with those who are (Leeuwis, 2004; Smits, 2002). This view implies that scaling up requires more than bringing the (technological) innovation to a broader audience. The main assumption underlying the learning alliance concept is that, by giving the processes of innovating and scaling up as much attention as to the innovation itself, barriers to uptake and replication can be overcome. Moriarty in his opening address to the 2005 learning alliance symposium states that the concept originates from the frustration that relevant and effective innovations, both technological and institutional, seldom move beyond the pilot stage.

When innovation is seen as a collective process of social learning, scaling up is also given a different tone. The idea of directing change and innovation in a straightforward manner towards pre-determined goals no longer holds good. A flexible process of building networks is needed, adapting to changing circumstances, and emerging dynamics. Responsive planning, careful recording, mutual understanding and critical reflection are key issues.

In the rhetoric for the New Water Decade, scaling up best practices at all levels is the main message, and trained technicians and professionals are needed to help people make informed decisions and rational choices (Meganck, 2005). We are not talking the same language here, because this is not what we mean by a constructive and carefully facilitated social learning process.

If learning alliances are meant to bring about change, a process perspective is essential. Social learning needs to be regarded not in an instrumental way, but as a process strategy to support the emergence and 'redesign' of innovations, while making use of building blocks and experiences that have been obtained elsewhere (see e.g. Dormon *et al.*, 2006). Only by challenging everyday practice can an innovation prove itself. Social learning is part of that process.

Look-alikes

Since the early 1990s several development concepts have shown a tendency to move away from the idea of a linear process of transformation of social, economic and technological systems. Learning alliances, in also claiming to move away from linear models, need to show how they differ from similar concepts like multi-stakeholder platforms (MSP), partnerships, and communities of practice (COP).

- **Multi-stakeholder platforms** – MSPs can be defined as processes that aim to involve stakeholders in improving situations that adversely affect them. The platform provides an interface between different actors, where different practices, cultures

and languages interact (Groot *et al*, 2002). The process enables different individuals and groups, who are affected by an issue, to enter into dialogue, negotiation, learning, decision making and collective action.[1] The platform emerges from the interaction, and is not established prior to process. Boxelaar names these platforms 'post-productivist'. "From a policy and land management perspective it makes sense to view the agricultural change context in post-productivist terms, as that reflects the embeddedness of agriculture and land management within broader processes and drivers of change, such as those that derive from the triple bottom line agenda" (Boxelaar, 2004:8). A typical MSP process model is based on the principles of action learning and consists of three stages: planning strategically (planning), implementing and managing (acting) and thirdly learning and adapting (reviewing). In MSP literature the need for skilled facilitation of the platforms is emphasised to manage the processes.

- **Partnerships** – In the 1970s, the concept of partnership emerged, striving for solidarity between donor and recipient. According to Fowler, partnership is a term describing relationships between NGOs finding common ground in: "…common goals, shared interpretation of the causes of poverty, agreed principles with people centred ways of combating poverty, mutuality in the contribution NGO's make and respect for the autonomy of each organisation. In short partnership was intended to be equality in ways of working and mutuality in respect for identity, position and role" (Fowler, 1998). Fowler indicates that the original partnership idea, with a strong commitment of the partners to development, eroded over the years under various interpretations, being used to cover all sorts of relationships. Fowler illustrates this development with the following example: "The use of the term partnership by international financial institutions like the World Bank is not premised on solidarity. It is used for building relations with non-state actors to improve lending performance" (Fowler, 1998).

- **Communities of practice** – A CoP, according to Wenger, is a self-organising group of persons who share a space and acquire a structure around (1) a domain, (2) a community and (3) a practice (Wenger, 1998). The practice is often work-related (in organisations) or connected to an interest that implies some degree of action (Lesser and Storck, 2004). Characteristics are common values, an interest in learning, a need for trust, striving for collaboration and different levels of member participation. CoPs are different from teams, and because of the confusion (and the erosion of the terminology), in some organisations the term of community of commitment (CoC) is now used, to indicate a clearer distinction from working teams or project groups.

MSPs, partnerships, CoPs and learning alliances have in common that they can be seen as structures as well as processes. Learning is an explicit element in MSPs, CoPs and LAs. In partnerships the learning is implicit, while the building of social or relational capital is explicitly mentioned. In relation to sustainable development, learning alliances could claim to comprise the best of all four concepts.

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[1] See also http://portals.wi.wur.nl/msp/

Let's look into the facilitation of learning.

Facilitation of learning

Learning alliances, as adopted by the water and sanitation sector, are often built on the assumption that the world contains systems that can be 'engineered'. This paradigm is part of 'hard systems thinking', using a language of problems and solutions (Checkland, 1988). Later, Checkland formulated the difference between hard and soft systems as follows. "The crucial difference is between on the one hand an approach (hard) which assumes the world to be a complex of systems, some of which may be malfunctioning, and on the other an approach (soft) which makes no assumptions about the nature of the world, beyond assuming it to be complex, but assumes that the process of enquiry can be organised as a system of learning" (Checkland, 1995). Human beings are seen as learners, each with world views and ideas about change in their contexts (Bawden, 1997). It is important to note that this kind of learning may not emerge automatically whenever people interact and act together, but often requires deliberate effort and facilitation. However, facilitation does not always mean the same thing to different people in different settings.

Thomas identifies four dimensions of facilitation (Thomas, 2005):
• Technical facilitator: skills based and formulaic in style
• Intentional facilitator: practice is grounded in theory and specific interventions are provided
• Person centred facilitator: intentional approach emphasising attitudes, personal qualities, and the presence of the facilitator
• Critical facilitator: raises awareness of the political nature of facilitation and the effects on all participants.
Many approaches to facilitation fit in one of these dimensions.

Approaches to facilitation classified as technical, focus on skills and competencies required to facilitate groups. The implicit assumption is that by training and mastering the necessary skills, any individual can learn to facilitate a group's process effectively. The definition is broadened a bit by some authors, like Justice and Jamieson (1999) who also draw attention to personal characteristics that are helpful to the facilitator (in Thomas, 2005).

This technical model of facilitation seems to predominate in literature about learning alliances. The risk here is that the cognitive aspect of learning is the only one in focus, regarding learning as instrumental to reaching a certain program result. This leaves out the emotional side, which comes to the fore in the values, attitudes and beliefs underpinning knowledge and experiences. Human behaviour is far more complex, than a 'box of tricks' mindset can handle (Hogan, 2002, cited by Thomas, 2005).

If we create learning platforms for sustainable water and sanitation systems, using the eyes of an engineer and a technical facilitation approach, the process outcome can be disappointing and unsustainable. These days, the concept of IRWM, which stands for

a more integrated and holistic approach, has been accepted in the sector along with services for the multiple-use of water. If we see learning alliances as processes, then these processes should be built accordingly. New behaviour and new arrangements between human beings and their organisations cannot simply be built by adopting new strategies, tools and techniques (see also Schwarz, 2002).

Schwarz (2002) developed an interesting distinction between two "control" models of human behaviour in difficult situations; let's say situations of interdependencies and negotiation as we know them in sustainable resource management. These models can easily be linked to the learning opportunities we aim to create in action learning processes like LAs.

The first is called the unilateral control model, which is characterised by the assumption that those in control understand the situation, and those who see it differently don't understand. Their lack of understanding results in questionable motives, which justifies feelings of anger and frustration by those in control. By unilaterally controlling the conversation and allowing one point of view to prevail, the opportunity to learn how others see issues differently is missed. Reducing the learning options in this manner leads the person in control to overlook the feedback on their behaviour and their possible contribution to the group's (in)effectiveness. It is easy to say that this model is outdated, but in many situations of technological change in a social context, this is still the prevailing model of control. At some point also participatory technology development (PTD) comes to an end. The technology is available and ways have to be found to introduce the technology and create ownership of its use. This is illustrated by numerous examples of the introduction of single-use water services in Koppen *et al*. (2006). The technical facilitator's approach fits very nicely with this model of unilateral control. Or to put it more bluntly: it is the only approach that fits.

The opposite model Schwarz calls mutual learning. This model is based on three assumptions: (1) I have some relevant information and so do other people, (2) each of us may see things that others do not and (3) differences are opportunities for learning. In this model, the prevailing principles are curiosity, transparency and joint accountability. Exploring different views and creating common understanding are explicitly part of the approach. We have already seen that these are important features for social learning. Schwarz illustrates this approach with examples showing that increased understanding is indeed created, because participants test (inaccurate) assumptions and create valid information about the situation at stake. Attributions about others are also tested, which reduces unproductive conflicts and defensive behaviour.[2]

For effective facilitation a process expert is needed. Further options have to be studied to consider for example, whether a researcher can also be a facilitator at the same time, positioned at the boundaries or in the middle, as action researchers would argue. A facilitative leader may be not the optimal choice, because this person needs to use

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[2] See for more information: www:scharzassociates.com

facilitative skills at the same time he or she as a leader wants to express views about the issues being discussed (Schwarz, 2002). CIAT however recommends assigning research and support staff to this task to ensure that goals are met and partners do not lose interest (Lundy, 2005:3).

Conclusions

After exploring the contribution that social learning can offer to the concept of learning alliances, we conclude this chapter by presenting some possible answers to our initial question: *What makes learning alliances a powerful idea?*

- LAs offer a good basis for bringing together the three basic components of innovation: software, for instance, through action research to reach compatible mindsets, orgware, enabling institutional environments (which are stronger in the water sector than in the agricultural sector), and hardware, the technological innovations.

- It is suggested that LAs are interconnected stakeholder platforms and must be "created and designed". These words reveal a view seen through the eyes of an engineer! This seems to ignore the fact that one must often deal with existing networks and platforms, which do not primarily exist for learning, and which cannot be legitimately bypassed. Developing networks is more appropriate than trying to design them.

- How do LAs with their multi-level character deal with issues of scale? The concept bears the premise that interaction between levels can open windows of opportunity to bring innovation processes to a broader scale. This is certainly a promising point for further study. For instance when innovation is defined as a process of knowledge creation in groups, it is necessary to understand how knowledge develops across scales ranging from individual to group to institutions. Who bring interface actors together? How can discovery learning be implemented between different levels?

- Bringing knowledge and technology to a broader audience leads the LA approach. Innovation is defined as a process by which new knowledge is created in groups or individuals who did not have it before. This knowledge seems to imply a greater willingness for the uptake of technology, appropriate and fit for the context. LAs are also important for the uptake of new approaches, taking into account that meaningful innovations are primarily about changing social relationships and that this requires a change of context, and an altered sense of what is appropriate.

- Conflict and power are mentioned as risks to be avoided in a LA. From a social learning perspective, one would argue that conflicts are part of the process dynamics and that a facilitator can make good use of them. In innovation, conflict is central to change and can be a positive force for dealing with conflicts, instead of avoiding them. Social learning enhances negotiation and conflict management.

• Learning is seen as the primary process: the purpose of the alliance is assumed to be learning. However, in the LA activities, it seems that documentation and dissemination only happen at the end of the process. Emphasis is on effective communication and information exchange. This implies first order learning, which is not enough to change contexts and social behaviour. Lundy *et al.* define learning as an element in the final phase of the process. A better option is to make learning an explicit part of the process from the very beginning. LA authors realise there are no recipes (no silver bullets). This is a very important opening that gives an opportunity for reflection, which is essential to ongoing learning in a development program. Sharing between actors catalyses the learning. So when reflection and learning are built in from the start, and not only at activity level, experiences and insights can be made useful for future action and strategy. In this approach, the action/reflection cycle stimulates capacity building in LAs. Supporting learning is essential, but must be anticipated and integrated in (the facilitation of) wider dynamics.

• Sometimes learning alliances seem to exist in the rosy world of make-believe, for instance by stating that programmes include all stakeholders at all levels. The literature tells us that successful innovations start with those who are interested and who show involvement and agency and who act upon their commitment. There may even be reasons for deliberately excluding some stakeholders. And to make things even more 'messy', recognising that ineffective communication may be politically effective can be part of the game. The ability to use power as well as to deal with it is essential in change processes. There is a need to beware of making the same assumptions about the LA concept as for partnerships, where there are undefined relationships and an assumption of equal positions. Trust-based relationships have to be built as a cornerstone of a learning alliance – they cannot be assumed.

Finally, some structural gaps have been identified, which need more attention. We mention two points that both relate to the issue of setting learning agendas. The first is the problem of diagnosing problems and opportunities. Some participatory approaches like PRA, are not successful (enough) especially with regard to identifying opportunities. A problem-based management approach offers a very limited scope. The problem-solving paradigm may have been useful in certain cases in the past, but has certainly lost its purpose in present multi-stakeholder situations, where people deal with complexity and uncertainties. In current writing about learning alliances it is not so clear how opportunities become part of the learning agenda. Similarly, there is little attention to how a learning alliance proposes to articulate implicit uncertainties, knowledge claims and gaps in understanding that require further attention and critical reflection. Thinking more about how relevant learning agendas may be set or come about is vital to further development of the LA concept. When these missing links can be combined with relevant expertise and experience, a very powerful concept for development will indeed evolve.

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Woman selling tomatoes in Bolivia
Picture: John Butterworth

3. Learning alliances: Building multi-stakeholder innovation systems in agro-enterprise development

Mark Lundy and Maria Verónica Gottret

Summary [1]

Millions of dollars are spent each year on research and development initiatives to improve rural livelihoods in the developing world. Despite this expenditure, rural poverty remains an intractable problem in many places. Among the multiple causes of this situation is the limited collective learning that occurs between researchers, development workers, donors, policy makers and private enterprise. As a result, useful research does not benefit the poor, lessons learnt do not influence research, donor and policy agendas are less relevant than they could be – and development falters. This paper describes how the Rural Agro-enterprise Development Project of the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT, its Spanish acronym) is tackling this problem by building learning alliances that engage multiple stakeholders with multi-layered sources of knowledge in processes of innovation to promote increased learning and effectiveness in rural entrepreneurial development.

Background

Traditional modes of knowledge production and learning have tended to follow a linear approach. Under this approach researchers and experts produce new knowledge [or have the knowledge] and then transfer it to those who need it, who will use it to innovate and change. This model follows what Gibbons *et al.* (1994) have called a "mode one" type of knowledge production, where knowledge is generated by a research community accountable to its disciplinary peers. Although in some cases this approach has proved to be practical and successful, it has failed to promote a continuous learning and innovation process able to cope with growing complexity and rapid change. As argued by Hall *et al.* (2004c), this approach neglects the dynamics of multiple knowledge sources, partnerships, diversity, social and institutional learning, and capacity development that are important aspects of innovation processes.

There are many reasons why traditional linear approaches for the generation of knowledge fail to respond to complex challenges and rapidly changing contexts. First, knowledge generation takes place without the involvement of the key stakeholders who need it to innovate. Second, users have limited access to 'experts' to answer their questions about implementation in a timely manner. Third, knowledge generation and pilot innovation processes take place in an environment removed from the realities of regions that can benefit. Fourth, failure to promote interaction among different sources of knowledge and develop user capacities in relation to the innovation, results in costly

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[1] An initial version of this work was published in Mark Lundy, Maria Verónica Gottret, and Jacqueline Ashby, "Learning Alliances: An Approach for Building Multi-Stakeholder Innovation Systems," ILAC Brief, no. 8 (2005).

transfer processes with limited coverage. Fifth, those who generate the knowledge have limited opportunities to follow-up on user adaptation and further innovation to understand what changes occur and why. Finally, traditional approaches provide limited feedback to researchers on critical new areas of research from development practitioners.

In response to the challenges posed by development and poverty reduction objectives, the learning alliance approach emerged in CIAT as a means to overcome the limitations of traditional approaches for the generation of knowledge and the fostering of innovation processes. Learning alliances follow what Gibbons *et al.* (1994) called a 'mode two' type of knowledge production that promotes the interaction of multiple actors with multi-layered sources of knowledge to cope with the complexity of fostering continuous technological, social and institutional innovations to respond to rapidly changing contexts and demands. The learning alliance approach grew out of several years of interaction with various development organisations in Central America and the realisation that CIAT needed to establish a more sustainable niche within a larger innovation system. Based on these reflections, the Rural Agro-enterprise Development Project developed a set of approaches, tools and methods to engage in a more proactive fashion with a range of actors.

Initially, CIAT learning alliances concentrated on scaling up (scaling out) and adapting existing research results, but they have rapidly evolved into vehicles for strategic research and capacity development by becoming dynamic multi-stakeholder innovation systems focused on rural agro-entrepreneurial development. The idea took shape in Central America and, by mid 2003, CIAT together with initial partners[2] launched the platform with financial support from the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC) in four countries. Since then, other partners have joined the initiative leading to a consolidating process that, by the end of 2005, included eight organisations. Based on the Central American experience as well as a parallel process in East Africa with the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Catholic Relief Services (CRS), CIAT's Rural Agro-Enterprise Development Project launched learning alliances in additional countries in East and West Africa and in the Andean Region of Latin America, and is initiating a similar process in Southeast Asia.

We currently understand a learning alliance to be a process undertaken jointly by research organisations, donor and development agencies, policymakers and private businesses. The process involves identifying, sharing and adapting good practices in research and development in specific contexts. These can then be used to strengthen capacities for development practice, generate and document development outcomes, identify future research needs and areas for collaboration, and inform public and private sector policy decisions. An iterative learning for change process (Gottret, 2006) among multiple stakeholders underlies the learning alliance approach, with multi-layered sources of knowledge, across multiple scales.

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[2] The initial partners of the Central America Learning Alliance included CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Germany's Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the National Agricultural University of Honduras (UNA), SwissContact and IDRC itself.

Given the dynamism and flexibility of this approach, there are often variations and adaptations underway at any given time in diverse contexts. This paper seeks to provide an overview of the general principles behind these diverse approaches as well as sharing some of the initial results and questions. The paper is structured in the following fashion. It starts with discussion of the conceptual framework that underlies the learning alliance initiative, followed by its objectives. Then, it reviews the methodological tools currently in use as well as the results from work in Latin America. The paper concludes with a reflection on the learning alliance process, and poses further questions to take this topic forward. It is important to highlight that parallel CRS learning alliances exist in more than 20 countries in Asia and Africa.

Conceptual framework

The learning alliance approach has its roots in two interrelated concepts: 'social learning' and 'innovation systems'. Combining these concepts, Gottret (2006) defines innovation as "the process of technical, social and institutional change that results from the interaction among multi-layered sources of knowledge and its transformation into new things, products or practices, applied in a specific institutional and cultural context."

Social learning

According to Leeuwis and Pyburn (2002), academicians introduced the concept of social learning with an interest in studying – and contributing to – interventions aimed at enhancing sustainable development (Dunn, 1971; Friedmann, 1984; Milbrath, 1989; Woodhill, 2002). As discussed by (Röling, 2002), the concept of social learning aims for a movement from a reductionist to a holistic perspective, and from a positivistic to a constructivist perspective to tackle complex problems that cannot be solve by taking only a techno-centric or a eco-centric position. This change in perspective requires, in addition to mastering technology and ecology, looking at problems as the outcome of human activity and critical thinking. Leeuwis and Pyburn (2002) highlight that the notion of social learning was presented primarily as a critique of earlier discourses, which assumed that the future could be planned rationally from above through a top-down approach. In contrast, social learning reflects the idea that the shared learning of interdependent stakeholders is a key mechanism for constructing sustainable societies. The concept of social learning has intertwined with related ideas such as soft systems thinking (Checkland, 1981; Bawden, 1994; Röling and Wagemakers, 1998) and adaptive management (Holling, 1995). A consistent characteristic of the various approaches is that they advocate for an interactive (or participatory) style of problem solving, whereby outside intervention takes the form of facilitation (Leeuwis and Pyburn, 2002).

Röling (1992) looks at social learning as an interactive process and attributes a central role to multi-stakeholder platforms in which the challenge is to facilitate interaction and to promote learning processes for change. According to Röling, this approach capitalises on the diversity of perspectives and experiences and seeks to harness the creative energy of collective engagement in problem solving. The facilitator's role is to help establish platforms and catalyse dynamics that enable such synergy to occur. Leeuwis, Pyburn and

Boon (2002) derive several conclusions about social learning. The first is that it is the processes and not the preconceived outcomes that are amenable to design. The second is that even if processes are amenable to design, facilitators can only design them to some extent since social learning processes are evolving, are contextual and are affected by uncertainties of various kinds. Inherent in the idea of social learning is that one cannot predict how processes will evolve, and what intermediary outcomes will be achieved, and neither can one foresee the capricious dynamics of human negotiation processes. The third is that it implies a movement away from methodological blueprints, and therefore, it is unhelpful and unproductive to try to structure and control interactive social learning processes by means of detailed ex-ante plans, schedules and procedures for the medium and longer term. This is incompatible with the idea that change processes are inherently context specific, messy and conflictual. Thus, facilitating an interactive process requires the weaving together of different strategies and activities in a flexible and contextual manner.

Innovation systems

As concerns about the role of knowledge and technology in economic development and poverty reduction increased, so has the scope of analysis expanded from exploring research and technology transfer to looking at the wider innovation process (Hall *et al.*, 2004c). The concept of innovation in agricultural knowledge and technology has its conceptual roots in debates that took place over the last three decades such as the work of Biggs on the institutional context of research (Biggs, 1978) and on multiple sources of innovation (Biggs, 1990). Chambers and Ghildyal (1985), Röling (1990 and 1992), Lall (1993), Engel and Salomon (1997) and Echeverria (1998) all made important contributions to the discussion of innovation.

Hall *et al.* (2004b) highlights that an important conceptual shift that influence innovation policies, has been an increased emphasis towards promoting innovation rather than focusing on research alone. As distinct from research and invention, innovation is a more complex process often requiring technical, social, and institutional changes, and involving the interaction of organisations across the conventional producer and user knowledge divide. Recently a number of policy analysts have started explicitly to use the innovation concept in relation to agricultural knowledge and technology generation, employing an innovation systems framework for policy research in developing countries (Hall *et al.*, 2001a and 2001b).

According to Hall *et al.* (2004c), the origin of innovation systems thinking can be traced to the idea of a 'national system of innovation' proposed by Freeman (1987) and Lundvall (1992). At its simplest, this concept states that "innovations emerge from evolving systems of actors involved in knowledge production and use". Lundvall (1992) identifies learning and the role of institutions as the critical components of innovation systems. He considers that it is not possible to understand learning without referencing its institutional and cultural context since it is an interactive and socially embedded process. Other applications of the concept of innovation systems can be seen in the work of Ekboir and Parellada (2001), Clark (2002), Byerlee and Alex (2003), Temel *et al.* (2003), Douthwaite *et al.* (2004), and Biggs and Messerschmidt (2004).

A combination of the key elements of both social learning and innovation systems underlies the learning alliance concept as developed by CIAT. The learning alliance seeks to engage actively diverse actors in processes of collaborative learning, adaptation and innovation through which all participants contribute to outcomes. CIAT recognises its role as a 'process facilitator' but actively seeks the participation of other members of the innovation system within which the process occurs. As the remainder of this Chapter shows, efforts have focused on developing process guidelines for this kind of work, rather than on detailed blueprints of inputs and expected outputs.

Objectives

Improved understanding of how to establish and maintain multi-stakeholder learning processes has the potential to benefit the developing world in several ways. Firstly, these learning processes help to develop cumulative and shared knowledge about approaches, methods and policies that work in different places, cultural contexts and times; those that do not; and the reasons for success or failure. Shared knowledge of this kind can contribute to improved development outcomes as lessons are learnt and practice or policy is modified accordingly. Secondly, learning alliances give participants an opportunity to learn across organisational and geographical boundaries through the establishment and support of communities of practice around specific topics. Thirdly, they promote synergy among multiple actors by providing a vehicle for collaboration, helping to highlight and develop diverse solutions to problems that may appear intractable to the individual actors. This leads to more rapid and effective innovation processes, helps to focus new research on key problems, provides development agencies and policymakers with access to specialised knowledge, and brings fresh insights to the assessment and improvement of research and development performance. Fourthly, learning alliances contribute to healthy innovation systems by building bridges between islands of experience, helping to assess how these results were achieved and what others can learn from these experiences. In this sense, a more effective innovation system develops through forging stronger direct links and through closer relationships between more distant partners. Finally, learning alliances provide a flexible mechanism that can be adapted to topics beyond the scope of agricultural research that are vital for improving rural livelihoods (e.g. healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and natural resource management).

In sum, the objective of the learning alliance approach is to add value and to leverage positive synergies across the range of actors that comprise the innovation system in which processes of rural enterprise development occur. This innovation system has myriad scales ranging from local to international with an equally diverse set of organisational partners. At the local level, the system interacts with and affects change on processes of local economic development, local planning and rural livelihoods in collaboration with local NGOs and, indirectly, their partners such as farmers and farmer associations. At a meso level, the system conducts strategic research by interacting with development strategies and approaches, public-sector policy, private sector policy and decision-making and broader processes of economic development.

At a macro scale, the innovation system established by learning alliances connects with trade policy and issues of social equity and justice. Thus, learning alliances promote the scaling up of learning processes by proactively involving policymakers in the design of approaches, strategies, methodologies and public and private policies that are more effective in achieving sustainable and more equitable development processes.

The learning alliance approach implemented by CIAT is not limited to farmers and farmer organisations. The majority of our learning occurs with actors who support and influence farmers and their organisations, including local and international NGOs, universities, government agencies and private sector firms. Through more structured learning processes, the learning alliance seeks to affect change in the larger innovation system in a way that provides support for subsequent innovation in rural communities. In this sense, the learning alliance differs from traditional 'bottom-up' approaches that seek to push change through complex systems (i.e. from the farm outwards) by actively identifying and using higher-order leverage points to generate incentives that pull change through the system. Building and testing organisational models that facilitate transparent links between rural communities and dynamic markets in collaboration with local and international NGOs, donors and private sector firms is one example of this. Learning at this level provides knowledge and incentives to leverage innovation on a much greater scale than does similar work at the farm level.

The decision to work with an innovation systems perspective across several scales has implications on how research organisations identify and define their agendas, the manner in which they carry out their research and disseminate their results. In this context, research must identify its niche clearly vis-à-vis participating actors and engage them throughout the entire research cycle. As a collaborative process, a learning alliance often mixes traditional socioeconomic research with action research, while generating a range of international public goods for a diverse set of actors. We posit that a Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centre is uniquely suited for this role. However, we are aware that this type of approach has not traditionally been an area of emphasis within the consultative group (CG) system. As such, the learning alliance approach attempts to break new ground and keep the CG vibrant and relevant for processes of enterprise development in rural communities and beyond.

Key principles

The establishment of learning alliances follows some basic principles drawn from previous experience. The following list is by no means exhaustive but should provide the reader with an idea of the key non-negotiable points that we have used in our work.

Clear objectives

Multiple stakeholders have different objectives and interests. The conformation of learning alliances is a result of the identification and negotiation of common interests based on practice, needs, capacities and interests of participating organisations and individuals. It is around this common interest space that learning alliances consolidate. What does each

organisation bring to the alliance? What complementarities or gaps exist? What does each organisation hope to achieve through the collaboration? Thus, the manner in which potential partners identify and negotiate their common interests will define who participates. In our experience, the general area of common interest has been rural enterprise development. Underneath that umbrella topic, other specific thematic areas of interest are defined. As each area of common interest becomes more specific, fewer organisations participate, but the transaction costs are lower. As each area of common interest becomes broader, more organisations will be interested in participating, but interaction costs will also be higher. A clear understanding of the diverse interests of the learning alliance partners and the definition of clear objectives helps to balance the level of participation with the capacity of the actors to work together.

Shared responsibilities, costs and benefits

Organisations and individuals participate in learning alliances when: (1) they perceive that they will obtain benefits from this association, (2) the transaction costs are lower than the expected benefits, (3) benefits are perceived to be higher than those obtained by working individually, and (4) results do not conflict with other key interests. As learning alliances seek to benefit all parties, the interaction costs and responsibilities, as well as benefits and credit for achievements, need to be shared among partner agencies in a transparent fashion.

Outputs as inputs

Rural communities are diverse and there are no universally applicable recipes for sustainable development. Learning alliances view research and development outputs as inputs to processes of rural innovation that are place and time-specific. Methods and tools developed by researchers will change as users adapt them to their needs and realities. Understanding why adaptations occur, the extent that these lead to positive or negative changes in livelihoods, and documenting and sharing lessons learnt are key objectives of a learning alliance.

Differentiated learning mechanisms

Learning alliances have a diverse range of participants, from rural women, youth and men (in general with rural-based livelihoods), through extension service and NGO workers, to entrepreneurs, policymakers and scientists. Identifying each group's questions and willingness to participate in the learning process is critical to success. Flexible but connected learning methods are needed. These can range from participatory monitoring and evaluation, through conventional impact assessment to the development of innovation histories.

Long-term, trust-based relationships

Rural development processes stretch over many years or even decades. To influence positive change and understand why that change has occurred requires long-term, stable relationships capable of evolving to meet new challenges. Trust is the glue that cements these relationships, but develops gradually as partners interact with each other and perceive concrete benefits from the alliance.

Methodology

The learning alliances established by the Rural Agro-enterprise Development Project at CIAT seek to: (a) build links between researchers, donor and development agencies, the public sector and private business to achieve more efficient processes of rural agro-entrepreneurial development; (b) establish an innovation system that matches the supply of new ideas with demand at the field or policy level; (c) open communication channels between diverse organisations with relevant experiences; and (d) design and test tools and methods for analysis and documentation that facilitate collective learning within and among organisations.

The major contribution of researchers to development with policymakers and private sector partners in a learning alliance is to help them move from single-cycle learning processes (planning, followed by action, evaluation of results, and back to planning to start another single cycle) to a double loop learning process. This includes periodic reflection after results are evaluated, during which partners review the basic premises on which strategic decisions are based. A double loop learning cycle helps to avoid the trap of replicating ineffective approaches because it facilitates critical thinking about what actually needs to be done (Fairbanks and Lindsay, 1999). The application of a double-loop learning process for each topic of interest (see Figure 3.1) is the primary means by which the alliance learns.

To achieve these aims, CIAT has implemented the following steps:
1. Identify and convene partner organisations with an interest in rural enterprise development.
2. Develop clear objectives, roles and responsibilities for the learning alliance.
3. Define specific topics of interest based on development practice needs and priorities.
4. Implement a double-loop learning cycle for each topic of interest.
5. Share results among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

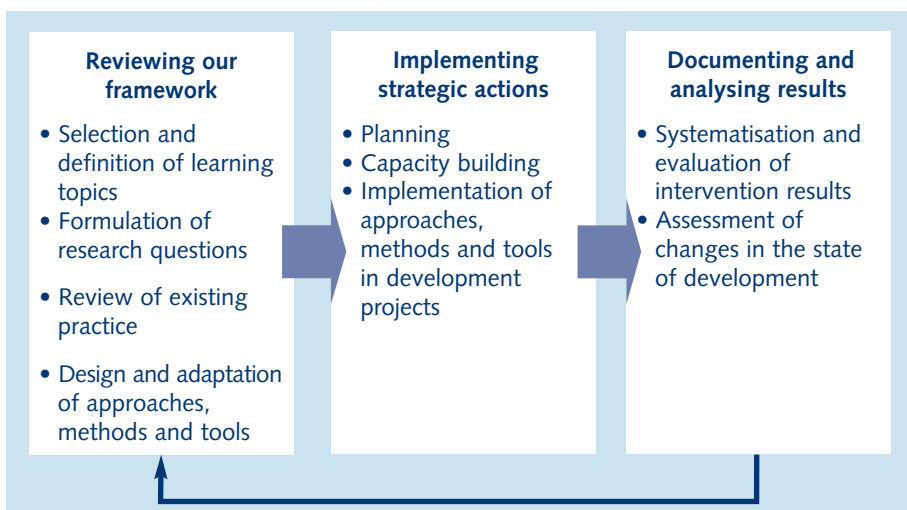| **Reviewing our framework**	**Implementing strategic actions**	**Documenting and analysing results**
• Selection and definition of learning topics	• Planning	• Systematisation and evaluation of intervention results
• Formulation of research questions	• Capacity building	• Assessment of changes in the state of development
• Review of existing practice	• Implementation of approaches, methods and tools in development projects	
• Design and adaptation of approaches, methods and tools		

Figure 3.1. The double-loop learning cycle in a learning alliance

Phase 1: Reviewing our framework

In this phase, the learning alliance partners identify any problems that are limiting the success of their interventions. They also try to view the issues from different perspectives and reflect critically on existing practice. This step helps to avoid the single-loop learning trap described above and leads to a clear definition of a set of topics on which the alliance agrees to work. Once a topic has been selected, the interested partners spell out the questions that need resolving. These questions frame the learning process and may range from basic development issues to full-blown research hypotheses, depending on the participants' interests (capacity building or strategic research) or intervention scale (micro, meso or macro).

Next, the partners undertake a review of the existing practice: results reported in the literature, institutional experience and current work by partner organisations. Special attention is paid to documenting positive experiences, or 'islands of success' that exist in similar cultural or geographic contexts, since these can often yield useful lessons or inputs for the learning process. The partners share the results of the review in a workshop and a short document. This process helps identify lessons learnt in a specific context and initiates the sharing of experiences and knowledge within and across organisations. The review leads into a process where learning alliance participants select, adapt and/or design diverse tools, methods, approaches or intervention strategies to equip partners with the necessary skills and information they need to apply good practice in the field. Intervention approaches and toolkits are designed as prototypes that different partner organisations are expected to adapt to suit specific needs and contexts.

Phase 2: Implementing strategic actions

The learning alliance facilitates the use of selected or designed tools, methods, approaches and strategies within ongoing development projects, validating their usefulness and adapting them to fit different contexts. The alliance organises capacity-building efforts to ensure that all partners can use and adapt approaches and the toolkit to their contexts. Capacity-building may involve researchers or may be initiated by one or more of the partner organisations, and it may be formal (e.g. workshops) or informal (e.g. exchange visits or consultations). The emphasis is on developing the capacity of partners to understand the underlying principles behind approaches or strategies, while the specific methods and tools are adapted or developed to suit partner-specific needs and contexts.

Finally, participating partner organisations apply the approaches and toolkits in the context of existing development projects, document the results and share them with others. Continuous informal consultations between participating partner organisations are promoted so that evolving results, both positive and negative, are quickly shared between partners and incorporated into ongoing work. Contributing to existing development activities helps ensure that the tools and approaches are practical and solve real-life problems. Thus, learning alliances are differentiated from traditional

information and knowledge networks in that they take the extra step of designing or adapting new approaches, methods and tools and providing support so that partners apply them and learn from the experience.

Phase 3: Documenting and analysing results

The learning cycle is complete only when results are properly documented, analysed and translated into broadly applicable lessons. Thus, throughout the process of design, capacity building and field application, processes and results are documented and shared, using simple frameworks. Methods include workshops, training and reflection sessions, joint fieldwork, process documentation and the use of a virtual learning platform and list server (www.alianzasdeaprendizaje.org).

The learning cycle concludes with a critical review of the field experience based on the initial questions defined in Phase 1. This stage allows participants to reflect on deeper issues that may not be part of their daily work. It also provides inputs for the construction of new approaches, intervention strategies, methods and tools. Participant organisations document the reflection process in a short summary and share it with other learning alliance members. Additional learning cycles may take place if there are unanswered or new questions that partner agencies wish to examine further.

Outcomes

CIAT first experimented with this approach in the year 2000 in collaboration with CARE Nicaragua and eight local partners in 10 municipalities. From there, the idea moved to East Africa, where a six-nation learning alliance was established with the East Africa Regional Office of CRS. These two experiences constitute a first phase of work, where the basic concepts of learning alliances were developed, tools were tested and promising initial results achieved.

From 2003 onwards, IDRC has supported a second phase of work in Central America that differs from the first phase in several important ways. Firstly, since its inception, the learning alliance in Central America has involved multiple partners including CARE, the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE), CIAT CRS, Germany's Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the National Agricultural University of Honduras, The Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Swisscontact and IDRC itself. Secondly, the Central American case marks the first use of internet-based tools to facilitate learning within and across partner organisations. A third difference is an explicit intent to incorporate donor agencies as key stakeholders in the learning alliance, although this has proved difficult to achieve in practice.

After two years of work, the Central American Learning Alliance has achieved important gains in regards to the development of partner capacity and the adaptation of tools to regional needs. Highlights in this area include more than 15 market opportunity identification studies, three complete supply chain analyses (with an additional six underway), the use and improvement of tools for rural knowledge management and processes of rural enterprise development in Nicaragua, Honduras

and El Salvador, and the development of a full-fledged virtual learning space. Current areas of work include an analysis of equity and governance issues in supply chains, the development of improved skills for the identification and development of sustainable business services and ongoing work focused on information and innovation processes in supply chains and how those may be supported by rural agro-enterprise development centres. Much still remains to be done but a recent assessment, using IDRC's outcome mapping method, indicated that the alliance has had significant impact on organisational focus and investment decisions.

In 2006, a more formal impact evaluation was initiated to assess and document organisational and institutional changes fostered by this participatory learning process, and its development impact in selected sites; to learn and reflect on the experience and make the necessary adjustments to improve its effectiveness. The impact assessment of the Central America Learning Alliance will take place at two levels. At the meso level, the study will assess institutional innovation, and at the local level will evaluate development impact to analyse to what extent, and how, institutional innovations have contributed to the generation of sustainable livelihoods among rural families supported by local learning alliance partners.

The most advanced ideas on learning alliances emerged in the Andean Region of South America. This work most closely mirrors the conceptual model explained above, in that it proactively seeks to involve the public sector, takes partner demands for learning as an entry point and focuses more on collaborative strategic research than on capacity building. A learning agenda was negotiated covering the following research themes: (i) public policy and links between market chains and local economic development; (ii) rural enterprise development and the inclusion of smallholders in market chains; (iii) governance, representation and equity in market chains; and (iv) knowledge management for innovation in market chains.

Despite lack of external resources, the Andean Region Learning Alliance was able to initiate activities in three of the four priority research themes due to strong partner commitment and its links with an existing initiative, the RURALTER Platform. Eight case studies of mechanisms to link smallholders with market chains, selected from the experiences of the learning alliance partners, were conducted in Ecuador and Colombia. Minimal financial resources limited the participation of more experienced researchers and, as a result, some case studies received only a superficial analysis. Action-research on the theme of knowledge management for innovation in market chains started in 2005 in Colombia and Ecuador, using funds from the German International Cooperation Ministry (BMZ) to examine speciality-coffee market chains. An ambitious study was conducted, linking with the Economic Development Forum of the RURALTER Platform, formed by the International Cooperation Centre for Agricultural Development (CICDA), Intercooperation (IC) and SNV. The study documented the factors that influence the success of associative rural enterprises. In 2006, again linking with the RURALTER Platform, the Andean Region Learning Alliance is starting a new regional study that includes Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador

and Peru, aiming to analyse the role on economic development and poverty alleviation of private company market chains that involve smallholders.

There is a willingness to expand these areas of research if financial backing can be found. A proposal was submitted to the Regional Fund for Agricultural Technology (FONTAGRO) to advance research into public policy to support market chain development and its links with local economic development. Twenty organisations from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru participated in the design of this research project to analyse the role of institutions and policy mechanisms to promote technological innovation in market chains, and its impacts on governance and equity. These organisations include research centres, universities, development cooperation agencies, development organisations, the Ministers of Agriculture in each of the four countries, and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN). In addition, a concept note was presented to the Inter-American Development Bank, in response to its call for proposals on the production of regional international public goods. Unfortunately, both proposals were rejected and it was not possible to start working on this research theme.

A final element is a global initiative between CIAT and CRS to develop or strengthen learning alliances in 30 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This process is similar to existing work with CRS in East Africa in Phase 1, in that it focuses on capacity building around CIAT strategy and tools for rural enterprise development, but it also incorporates some elements of Phase 2 (e.g. the use of a multi-lingual virtual learning platform) and could potentially evolve into a platform for strategic research. The scope of this global learning alliance with CRS presents its own special demands and opportunities for learning across geographic and cultural boundaries.

Discussion

Based on the above, it is fair to ask how the outcomes of five years work on learning alliances compare to traditional innovation processes described previously. In Table 3.1, the key criticisms of the linear innovation model are compared with the initial outcomes from learning alliances.

The learning alliance approach represents an important advance when compared to linear innovation models. However, there are still areas where effectiveness is limited. Key among these is the need to adequately document, analyse and share knowledge quickly after it is generated. The Central American Learning Alliance developed simple, one-page guides to document field experiences in the hope that these would lead to timely exchanges of lessons learnt and thus speed the innovation process. At field level, these tools have met with limited success as learning alliance partners exchange knowledge directly via phone calls, visits or e-mail rather than following the documentation guide. While this is certainly effective in promoting knowledge sharing, it makes the identification and tracking of key innovations difficult from a research point of view, and limits the possibilities of further diffusing the knowledge that is generated.

Table 3.1. Linear innovation models and learning alliances: Comparison of critical areas

Linear innovation model	Learning alliance approach
Knowledge generation occurs without the participation of key stakeholders	Key stakeholders participate directly in setting the research agenda as well as in specific action-research activities that generate or improve knowledge.
Users have limited access to experts to answer implementation questions in a timely fashion	Provision of backstopping and coaching by researchers and other experienced alliance partners through staggered training sessions, programmed field visits and continuing exchanges using ICTs.
Knowledge generation and pilot innovation occurs a long way from the realities of the field	Knowledge generation and pilot innovation occurs in rural communities with the participation of researchers, development agents, enterprises and community members.
Limited interaction among knowledge sources and users leads to costly transfer processes and limited coverage	Links between learning alliance participants promoted to develop processes of horizontal learning and adaptation. Strategies include face-to-face exchanges (field visits, workshops, knowledge fairs) and virtual spaces (website and e-mail). These strategies foster knowledge diffusion and improve coverage.
Knowledge generators have limited opportunities to follow-up on user innovation and adaptation to understand why change happens or does not happen	Knowledge generators – both researchers and others – are directly involved in user innovation and adaptation, and can document insights on how and why change occurs (or not) in specific cases, and can conduct comparative analysis among different sites and contexts.

An additional area of concern is that of backstopping and coaching. In practice, CIAT has played a lead role in backstopping despite the fact that many partner agencies possess significant and relevant capacities to facilitate processes. Finding ways to overcome organisational sensitivities, especially at a higher managerial level – i.e. why

is the 'competition' providing 'us' with training and backstopping – remains a key issue. In a similar vein, providing organisational incentives for knowledge sharing between NGOs that compete for funds from similar donors is a challenge.

Finally, what kind of learning is actually occurring within the alliances? Initial results from outcome mapping[3] and focused interviews in Central America highlight changes in organisational learning practices and development interventions as well as the acquisition or improvement of specific knowledge and capabilities. Table 3.2 presents a brief description of the kinds of learning encountered in Central America.

Table 3.2. Types of learning documented in the Central America Learning Alliance

Type of learning	Description
Organisational learning practices	• Improved internal information flows between agency offices in Central America, mainly through informal channels. • Development of an atmosphere of shared organisational learning among partner agencies, leading to increased cooperation. • Contribution to institutional organisational learning initiatives that go beyond the theme of rural agro-entrepreneurial development.
Development interventions	• Increased focus on marketing and supply chains, not only on farm agricultural production. • More ordered and complete development processes that incorporate processes of enterprise development. • Implementation of focused complementary research to have a better understanding of rural enterprise development processes.
Specific knowledge and capacity development	• Use and adaptation of a wide range of enterprise development tools[4] in four countries by 19 partner agencies working with a total of 57 local agencies.

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[3] For more information on this method, please see http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation
[4] These tools include the formation of local enterprise working groups, identification of market opportunities, supply chain analysis and upgrading and processes of knowledge management and innovation for rural enterprises.

For participating partner agencies and their staff, the kind of learning occurring in the Central American Learning Alliance has several implications. First, participating staff are recognised within their organisations and by others as resource people for processes of enterprise development. Participants access knowledge and hone specific skills that improve their capacity to lead market-oriented processes of rural development. Secondly, participating organisations are able to generate innovative interventions based on increased staff capacity and knowledge as well as on improved internal knowledge management. This helps the organisation to differentiate itself in the development marketplace and to compete more effectively for scarce resources. Our hypothesis is that the combination of personal and organisational change will lead to more effective processes for rural development by partner agencies. This point is currently being evaluated in Central America through a specific monitoring project, with the results due by the end of 2006.

Conclusions

A learning alliance approach is not suited for all agricultural research projects. However, for researchers and projects who work directly with, or hope to effect change within a given rural innovation system, this approach can be of significant use. The following challenges and recommendations were highlighted by CIAT's experience with learning alliances, and they need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of this approach for the generation of knowledge:

Partner and participant selection
The selection of partner agencies and appropriate individuals within those agencies is critical to the success of a learning alliance. Both agencies and individuals should be open to critical reflection and to learning about their own practice, and willing to challenge their own reference frameworks and premises. However, this need for openness clashes with the constant need to demonstrate positive impacts for donors, to continue receiving financial support. The importance given to the latter in detriment to the former varies among participating organisations, and depends in part on the organisational culture and the type of leadership.

In addition, partner and participant turnover should be minimised, since this has a significant negative impact on the learning process. Adequate selection of agencies and staff who meet these criteria can be a major challenge for a learning alliance. Providing that adequate partners and participants can be identified, a collateral issue arises in how to maintain their participation. To this end, the development and implementation of an effective communication strategy is important. Through effective communication it is feasible, not only to highlight important results obtained by participants, but also to provide them with the space they need within their own organisation to continue innovating. Keeping the supervisors of participants informed is a key requirement for a well functioning alliance.

Balancing diverse needs and expectations

As the learning alliance evolves and diverse partner agencies achieve (or do not achieve) what they expected from the process, the alliance needs to adapt the thematic focus or the methods through which it works, to suit partner needs. In Latin America, several different clusters of partners can be identified by needs and aspirations. One group is clearly focused on building or enhancing their capacity and skill base to support processes of rural enterprise development. The major focus of this cluster of partners is on concrete and practical approaches and methods that can lead to more efficient development processes. A second group of partners is clustered around the idea of developing new methods, tools and approaches. This group participates in or leads processes of action research that generate field guides and similar publications. A third cluster of partners can be identified around more strategic research topics. These partners are interested in understanding key principles and lessons that can be drawn from a range of experiences in rural enterprise development. This cluster forms an effective lobby for more traditional research activities as well as for influencing policy. In practice, it is common to see partner agencies active in more than one of these clusters.

This clustering has implications for processes of facilitation, resource mobilisation and the definition of research agendas. Understanding the relative importance of each partner in the learning alliance and their principal needs or expectations is important in order to manage conflicting interests and identify possible synergies between clusters. This process is far from simple and should be taken seriously by the facilitation team.

It is also common for some partner agencies who were initially dynamic to reduce their participation and/or decide to leave the learning alliance altogether, while other partners join. Our experience indicates that this process is not necessarily negative, but is rather a natural process related to the changing needs and aspirations. While care needs to be taken to maintain a critical mass of partners, some changes over time are inevitable.

Process facilitation and coordination

Establishing a learning alliance, while time consuming, is relatively straightforward once appropriate partners have been identified. The maintenance of the learning alliance and its on-going facilitation, however, are considerable challenges. To stay vibrant, a learning alliance must adapt and change as learning occurs and new questions arise. Our experience suggests that assigning research and support staff to this area as needed is important, to ensure that goals are met and partners do not lose interest. Given the centrality of this approach to the current research agenda of the Rural Agro-enterprise Development Project, major elements of research staff time are assigned to manage learning alliances. While the largest share of development project budgets will be allocated to project implementation, financial resources are also needed to support personnel to give time to engage in learning alliance activities.

Funding

Finding a donor agency interested in funding an open-ended learning process is likely to be difficult, and it may be easier to get funding for specific research and development projects that use a learning alliance as an implementation mechanism.

However, resource mobilisation is often a slow process and if partners do not start activities with their own funds, momentum is lost and interest fades. Funding for learning alliances can also be found by linking with large development initiatives, making efficient use of researchers' time, and identifying alliance activities that can complement or link with dissemination, training and monitoring and evaluation budgets. The issue of funding should be discussed early during project design and in the alliance building process to guarantee a modicum of sustainability.

There has also been debate within learning alliances themselves about whether or not this platform should strive to raise money. Some partner agencies have argued forcefully that the alliance should only carry out additional work based on funds received from the partners themselves. Others feel that the learning alliance would be missing significant opportunities to affect positive change if it did not seek to consolidate funding for joint activities among partner organisations. The decision of whether or not a learning alliance should actively seek funding is best left to the partner agencies.

Linking learning across levels

Documenting, analysing and sharing learning from diverse partner agencies at the micro, meso and macro scales is very demanding for all participants, while drawing out key livelihood and development policy implications from such a wide range of experiences takes a good deal of time and thought. Selecting a few key research questions that link partner agencies is one way to manage the demands of the learning alliance approach. Equally, the creative application of diverse tools and methods to promote network building among partners and the use of decentralised processes of reflection and learning also helps (e.g. regional learning fairs with local partners, topic-driven short workshops, virtual discussions).

Questions on how to link learning processes at a regional scale to local processes are currently being discussed in Central America. Despite relatively positive advances with existing partner agencies[5], the same partners would like to see similar processes occurring with local partners in each country. In concrete terms, this implies tripling the number of actors involved in the learning processes. Effective methods and tools that allow local partners not only to implement and adapt prototypes developed by the learning alliance in general, but also strengthen horizontal communication and exchange at country scale, are currently under development. This issue is common across many learning alliances, as most partner agencies now work with a range of local partners.

It is important to note that the establishment and facilitation of learning alliances require significant investments of time and personnel resources. If researchers themselves carry out these activities, it may be difficult to achieve the kind of international publicly accessible publications expected from CG scientists. Possible ways around this issue

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[5] These partner agencies tend to have a large geographic mandate (e.g. a country) but do much of their work through local partner agencies with a much smaller focus (e.g. Departments or States). There is a fairly clear pyramid effect here: partner agencies multiply as the scale becomes more local.

include the use of partner agencies as conveners and facilitators, the development of links to other research organisations (e.g. universities in the north) and a tightly defined research agenda. During the first few years of a learning alliance, much time and effort will be spent on getting things running and carrying out the necessary fieldwork and research activities for the generation of results that are freely available internationally. Based on our experiences, we feel that learning alliances can evolve into very effective research platforms once they reach a certain level of maturity.

In conclusion, the learning alliance approach developed by CIAT attempts to reposition the centre in relation to other research, development and policy actors by establishing a clear role as a learning facilitator that adds value to existing activities, responds to partners' demands, and effectively links research to development processes. After four years of effort, the approach is providing a host of learning opportunities in more than 30 countries globally with a multitude of partner agencies. Others are adapting the approach for use in the water and sanitation sector and for watershed management in Latin America with support from CIAT. We are still in an early stage of developing a standard model for this work but initial results seem promising. Over the next few years, we hope to see the learning alliance approach consolidated as a valid method for more direct and effective articulation between research and rural development processes.

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PART II: Experiences from the WASH sector

Supporting communities to take informed decisions
Picture: CINARA

4. Multi-stakeholder learning in Colombia; from TRANSCOL to Team Learning Projects

Jan Teun Visscher, Mariela García and Niels Röling

Summary

This chapter discusses the experience of the Technology Transfer Project on Water Supply Treatment (TRANSCOL) and some subsequent experience. TRANSCOL was implemented between 1989 and 1996 by the Research and Development Institute on Water Supply and Sanitation, CINARA of the University of Valle in Cali, Colombia, in close collaboration with the IRC International Water Supply and Sanitation Centre. The project was oriented to scaling up ('up' and 'out') community water supply treatment by multi-stage filtration in Colombia. In essence, it was a multi-stakeholder learning project with many of the characteristics of a learning alliance.

This chapter describes the project, its strategy and results, and some subsequent experiences of CINARA and IRC. It includes a review of the long-term results based on recent interviews with people ten years after their involvement in the project. The mixed results allow important lessons to be drawn about the approach, the need for structured facilitation and the need to change university education.

Introduction

The TRANSCOL project[1] was initiated in 1989 to introduce water treatment by multi-stage filtration (MSF) in eight regions in Colombia. It received financial support from the Netherlands government and different Colombian organisations who had already at that time agreed on the importance of water quality improvement. This was quite forward looking as, even today, water quality is still an underrated issue in community water supply. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the world's targets for reducing extreme poverty in its many dimensions by 2015 – income poverty, hunger, disease, exclusion, lack of infrastructure and shelter – while promoting gender equality, education, health, and environmental sustainability, talk about providing a 'safe water supply' to the unserved population of 1.1 billion people (UN Millennium Project, 2005). This figure is based on the statistics of the (UNICEF and WHO) Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP).

The JMP and the MDGs use different terminology. While the MDGs aim at *safe* water, for the JMP 'unserved' means that people do not have access to some form of *improved* water supply. The difference in terminology is important: 'improved' is not necessary the same as 'safe'. For example, access to piped water supply is considered to be access to improved water supply, but in fact many supplies do not include

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[1] TRANSCOL was formulated as a project to obtain funding from the Netherlands government. In fact it is better characterised as a programme, because it included several projects and, during implementation, was able to adjust its approach supported by additional resources, obtained particularly within Colombia.

adequate water treatment and many provide only an intermittent supply and therefore cannot be considered 'safe' (Lloyd and Helmer, 1991; Visscher *et al.*, 1995 and 1996 Quiroga *et al.*, 1997). The unserved population in terms of 'safe' water supply is therefore considerably larger.

In Colombia, it is estimated that 80 percent of the water supply systems depend on surface water (Foster *et al.* 1987). Often this water is subject to bacteriological and sometimes chemical contamination and needs to be treated to avoid the risk of disease transmission. This can be done by the users, for example, by boiling the water before they use it, or by including water treatment in their water supply system. A survey in 1997 in 641 of a total of 1,068 municipalities showed that only 16 % of small urban centres below 10,000 people, were considered to have adequate treatment. In rural areas, the situation in Colombia is even more critical today. A survey in 2002 showed that only 7 % of water supplies received some form of treatment (El Tiempo, 2004), and that only some of this treatment can be considered effective.

Rural water supply treatment is complex

Rural water supply treatment in developing countries is very complex as it has to function in a very constrained environment. The treatment process therefore has to be robust, reliable and relatively simple to operate and maintain. Multi-stage filtration (Box 4.1), a biological water treatment system developed by CINARA and IRC in Colombia on the basis of earlier experience with slow sand filtration, was felt to meet these criteria and a project was established to introduce this technology on a broader scale in Colombia.

Box 4.1. Multi-stage filtration (MSF)

Multi-stage filtration is a combination of coarse gravel pre-filtration and slow sand filtration (SSF). In the pre-filtration system water passes through layers of gravel and in the SSF through a layer of sand. The treatment involves a combination of biological, physical and chemical processes, with the biological process being strongest in the 'Schmutzdecke', the 'dirt layer' or bio-film that is formed on top of the sand bed as material is strained from the water. The combination of these processes allows treatment of more contaminated water sources than is possible by SSF alone. MSF is a robust and reliable water treatment method that can be maintained by operators with low levels of formal education. It is much better suited to rural communities and small and medium size municipalities in the South as well as in more remote areas in the North, than chemical water treatment (Galvis et al., 1998).

The management of an MSF, because of its biological nature, requires good care particularly in controlling the filtration rate and the cleaning processes. This in turn requires that the operator understands treatment processes to manage this 'water-ecosystem'. The treatment concept includes protection of the water source and catchment area to ensure that water of the best possible quality reaches the MSF. The role of the users is important in three respects. They may i) contribute to protection of the catchment area where they may have cattle, cut trees or work their fields, they may ii) support the adequate performance of the system by adopting an efficient water use, thus putting less pressure on the flow rate and they may iii) occasionally assist the operator in more laborious operations such as re-sanding the SSF units or washing the gravel.

The project to introduce this technology on a broader scale in Colombia included much more than just the technology. It looked at the existing situation, the prevailing water culture and the institutional situation. It also looked at the role of the users as it may influence the water supply. Users may undertake activities in the catchment area which affect the water quality, or open their taps all day, thus leaving others without water, or exert pressure on the operator to supply more water, which may lead operators to bypass the treatment system.

Introducing MSF in Colombia

MSF showed very good results in projects close to Cali which generated considerable interest in several municipalities. The question became how to transfer the technology to other communities and how to scale-up the approach so as to make it part of the regular operations of drinking water supply development agencies.

According to Rogers (1995) "technology transfer is the exchange of technical information between the Research and Development workers who create a technological innovation and the users of the new idea". The conventional conception of technology transfer is that of a 'one way process' through which the results of basic or applied research are put into use. In this limited view, the technology is seen as hardware, a physical product. At the same time Rogers acknowledges that "technology consists of software as well as hardware, and thus that it is essentially composed of information, making technology transfer a communication process, a two-way exchange. Even when a technology moves in one direction, such as from a university to a private company, the two or more parties must participate in a series of communication exchanges as they seek to establish mutual understanding about the meaning of the technology. "

This narrow definition of technology transfer, being the transfer of a technical solution, does not explain the learning environment needed to ensure that the technical solution matches the problems felt by the users; nor does it look at the critical role of the environment in which the technology has to be embedded. Even in its narrow definition, technology differs from scientific laws that have a universal character, in that it encompasses the historical fingerprint of the society that produced it. Technologies are usually developed to solve a specific problem; transfer to a different context often leads to failure or deficient performance (Reddy, 1977 cited in García *et al*, 1997), unless it is reinvented (adjusted to the new environment). When the technology is adopted on a larger scale, it leaves in turn its footprint on the society that uses it. In line with this perspective, technology transfer can be understood by using actor network theory (ANT) which is based on a systems way of thinking (Visscher, 2006). In this theory, actors are both persons and things (such as technology) that can influence each other; many other theories see only persons as actors. Latour (1999) suggests that ANT is useful for studying fast changing and fuzzy issues where boundaries are not clear. Perhaps in contrast to what one might believe from an engineering point of view, it can be argued that water supply systems are indeed fuzzy and very complex.

Opting for a people oriented learning approach

The CINARA/IRC team realised that various factors in the Colombian context implied that the technology transfer paradigm (Rogers, 1995) would not be adequate to ensure widespread use of MSF in rural communities or its incorporation into the approaches of agencies. These factors included 1) the strong bias of engineers towards conventional chemical water treatment, 2) the very limited experience of communities with water supply treatment, and 3) the limited institutional support for rural water supply, leaving the sustainability of systems mostly in the hands of communities.

The team therefore decided to develop TRANSCOL as a people oriented approach, which also embraced a learning culture. The project worked with sector institutions and communities in a joint learning environment, characterised by mutual respect. It aimed to accommodate the different levels of experience of communities and the diversity of agencies. Its approach is very much in line with the view of Röling and Jiggins (1998) that humans acting effectively in the environment, depend on their ability to collectively learn, construct and share useful knowledge and technology. An effective water supply system is the emergent property of interaction among multiple stakeholders.

TRANSCOL became a multi-stakeholder learning project comprising different nested platforms, which has many characteristics of a learning alliance as defined by Moriarty *et al*. (2005). One important difference was the fact that the highest platform only comprised the two leading implementing agencies, CINARA and IRC, and did not include representatives from the other stakeholders. This was only partly compensated for by the interaction of the CINARA teams at the regional level, because this level did not include formal representation from national government or communities, although they did occasionally participate in project meetings. Another aspect that was less developed concerned the collective interest in the innovation. It can be argued that CINARA and IRC, based on discussions with some stakeholders, identified the problem and the potential solution instead of following a joint process of identification problems and solutions. On the other hand, as shown below, the project and its results show that the regional organisations and the participating communities did buy into the process.

The TRANSCOL project : The philosophy made the difference

The TRANSCOL project was considered necessary as regional organisations involved in the water sector in Colombia became interested in water quality improvement. They started to build systems, often using inadequate designs that led to poor performance and huge operation and maintenance problems. A clear need existed to disseminate the new experiences with MSF and to establish advisory capacity in the regions. This was even more important because the Colombian government, in line with international trends, was shifting responsibility for water sector planning from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Development and initiating a process of decentralisation in which municipalities became responsible for their own water supply service.

TRANSCOL had two main objectives:
• To introduce water treatment by MSF in eight regions in Colombia through the development of 16 demonstration plants, two in each region;
• To establish working groups in these regions which could serve as future advisors on the implementation of MSF technology in their region.

Initially the project was developed by staff with an engineering background, but even at an early stage social scientists became involved and a real multi-disciplinary team effort emerged. A systematic project strategy was developed that comprised of a series of logical stages (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2. Project stages

• **Selection of regions:** taking into account the potential for MSF application and the existence of institutional interest to participate in the process.
• **Introductory seminar in each region:** after meeting political and institutional leaders involved in the sector, a regional seminar was held to present the project, its objectives, philosophy, strategies and organisation. The relationship between project activities and sector policies and the important role of research and development were discussed.
• **Establishment of Inter-institutional Regional Working Groups (IRWGs):** each regional seminar resulted in the establishment of an IRWG, formed by staff from all key sector institutions, and in agreements about the support these institutions would provide.
• **Selection of project sites:** carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of IRWG members, guided by two staff members of CINARA, an engineer and a social scientist. Selection started by reviewing information available in the institutions followed by a one-day visit to each of ten preselected communities to discuss their interest and to verify and complement the information. Subsequently two communities were selected, based primarily on the following criteria: good accessibility, existence of a water supply system with a water quality problem that could be solved by MSF treatment, willingness of the community to participate, presence of a sector institution to support the project and the feasibility of implementing it within a reasonable time;
• **Development of a project design for each community:** started with a three-day field visit to collect additional information and establish initial agreements with the community. Thereafter, a two-week training of IRWG members was arranged in Cali to learn about MSF and the learning approach and to visit existing MSF systems in Valle del Cauca. Participants returned to their regions with an outline design of the MSF system and an initial socio-educative plan for working with the community in the different project phases.
• **Start-up activities in the community:** began with a creative workshop in which community members, men and women, reflected on the potential health benefits of water quality improvement, and reviewed and approved the plans for the water treatment plant and for socio-educative activities. They also discussed the costs and the possible implications for the water tariff needed to sustain the system.
• **Financing, tendering and construction:** started by verifying available financial resources in the communities and agencies, and levels of credit required. Tender documents were drawn up by the IRWGs and tender procedures implemented,

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mostly through the municipalities that subsequently made a contract with a contractor. Construction was organised in consultation with the community whose members participated in an official monitoring committee. Training of water committees and operators (who had no experience with water treatment) began during construction.

- **Starting up the plant:** began by accompanying the operator and the water committee in the process of initiating plant operation, filling the units with water, putting them into operation and gradually increasing the flow velocity as maturation of the biological layers took place. Efforts were made to raise community awareness about efficient water use.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** comprised several visits from IRWG and CINARA staff to support the water committee and the operator to monitor the performance of the system and to analyse possible problems with its functioning and use. As part of the overall evaluation, a national workshop was organised in which staff from IRC, CINARA and the IRWGs, and community members, participated.
- **Dissemination of results:** was done through meetings and, more frequently, through advisory services and follow-up activities in the projects, including hosting visitors interested in MSF and in developing new projects.

Box 1 shows the logical sequence of events, but what really made the difference was the philosophy behind the project and the approach followed within the stages. Project staff adopted what they called a 'joint learning project approach' which is characterised by the following key elements:

A development paradigm centred on people
The centre of interest was transferred from the technology to the people. It started from the premise that the actors, both in institutions and in communities, possess knowledge and experience that can be built on. Communities were not seen as beneficiaries, but as actors in search of their own development who take decisions throughout the development process. The project adopted the view of Paulo Freire (1972) that 'people should not be considered empty vessels which need to be filled up with information'. This dramatically modifies the concept of the external agent who knows all, while the recipient community knows nothing. Moreover, the communities and institutions were considered to have complementary capabilities that needed to be brought together to achieve results.

Dialogue and participatory techniques
By using participatory approaches, projects become a space where authorities, institutions and community share their experiences. This space enables the community to review the history of their water supply system and to give their views about problems and potential solutions. Participatory techniques such as mapping were used to visualise and clarify the situation and to provide a basis for project development. This helped to stimulate dialogue which differs from the more usual kind of discussion, which has its roots in 'percussion' and 'concussion', literally a heaving of ideas back and forth in a winner-takes-it-all competition (Senge, 1990).

Adopting a systemic orientation

'Hard' system thinking has been at the heart of the WSS sector for a long time, seeing technology as the main solution to a straightforward problem of people not having adequate water supply. According to Checkland (1989), hard system thinking assumes 'a relatively well structured problem in which there is virtual agreement on what constitutes the problem: it remains to organise how to deal with it'. This way of thinking has been persistent in the sector because of the dominance of engineers, who in their educational background are very well equipped to think systematically and to focus on problem solving, and the virtual absence of users in decision making. However, the poor performance of many water supply systems shows that the problems are much more complex.

A soft system orientation is needed, questioning the problem in its overall context and leaving room for different interpretations. In practice, a multiplicity of views on both the problem and its potential solutions will emerge, suggesting that absolute truth does not exist (Engel, 1995). We deal with different interpretations of reality that are products of the experience, knowledge and views of participants. In TRANSCOL, a combination of hard and soft systems was therefore adopted.

Establish an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional learning environment

Development problems are of such magnitude that they cannot be resolved from the perspective of a single discipline or a single institution (Max-Neef, 1987). The approach, therefore, was to try to break the barriers and create a space where the different disciplines and the community could meet, review developments and contribute their experience. This permitted all actors to jointly explore the causes of problems, identify solutions and establish commitment about their implementation.

Process facilitation

In view of the complexity of the problems and the differences in the background of the actors, facilitation played a crucial role. The project adopted Freire's view that it is necessary to challenge participants (from the community and the institutions) to use their creativity to identify problems and possible solutions, and to take decisions accordingly. This required the creation of a learning environment in which participants could question and confront viewpoints and perceptions. This needed good facilitation to help participants to gain self-esteem and autonomy and to empower them to challenge the existing situation and model it to suit their own objectives.

In TRANSCOL the process was facilitated by a CINARA team, consisting of engineers and social scientists, who helped information to be shared at all levels: between different stakeholder groups within the communities, between technical and social staff within the institutions and between institutions and communities.

It is important for the facilitator to stimulate a collective learning process that starts with dialogue, or an open exchange of ideas in the group. This permits participants to discover their potential and perceptions, which is difficult for them to do alone. Team

learning develops the skills of groups of people to look beyond individual perspectives. This is not easy, particularly in a politicised environment such as the water and sanitation sector in Colombia. For staff from sector organisations to assume the role of facilitator implies a considerable change from their normal approach. They may feel vulnerable and need training and most of all a new attitude to be able to act as effective process facilitators. It is not enough to learn new methodologies, new 'tricks'. What really counts is a learning attitude, and learning how to establish an environment of respect for conflicting views, even to the extent that they go against your own opinion.

Throughout the project an approach was followed that combined structured learning events both in CINARA in Cali, and in the regions, with learning by doing in the field in partnership with the community. This approach created an environment in which partners could gain confidence and develop ideas and activities and obtain feedback from their trainers, and perhaps more importantly, from their colleagues and peers. The learning projects created a 'safe' space to experiment with the technology in close collaboration with institutions and communities, thus allowing the technology to be checked against real world problems (Quiroga *et al.*, 1997).

Stimulating women's involvement

TRANSCOL did not at that time adopt the gender approach that is now promoted in the sector (see Wijk, 2001), but it did make special efforts to stimulate the involvement of women through house visits and by organising meetings at times and places that did not interfere with their daily work. Creative workshops proved an excellent mechanism for this and for team building. Other forms of communication such as painting, music, theatre, modelling and poetry were used in these workshops to bring participants closer together and to stimulate sharing experiences. This also helped the less vocal participants (unheard voices, often of poor men and women) to gain self-confidence and 'voice' opinions, sentiments, preferences, objections and ideas in public.

The actors and the project network

The project involved a large number of actors operating in what can be viewed as interacting and nested platforms for decision making (Figure 4.1). In his discussion of resource use negotiation, Röling (1994) defines a platform for decision-making as a nodal point of social interaction among stakeholders to allow for integral decision-making about a resource they perceive to be in need of management. He argues that stakeholders coming together in a platform to manage an ecosystem must learn from scratch about the system, agree on its boundaries, share concepts about its sustainable management and develop indicators for success and methods for making things visible (Röling, 1994). Visscher (2006) argues that in the water sector such platforms must be able to operate with four logics: (a) the logic of the ecosystem, both in terms of catchment management and the management of the biological process in the SSF; (b) the logic of the social process by which human activities translate into cubic metres of purified water; (c) the organisational logic including rules and regulations and other institutional issues; and (d) the purely technical management of water involving aspects such as flows through pipes, filtration rates, etc.

CINARA, with its advisors and in close collaboration with IRC, can be considered the **first platform,** having decision-making authority over the part of the project that was financed by the Netherlands government. They worked in collaboration with national institutions that co-financed the learning projects. Multidisciplinary teams of engineers and social scientists were established in CINARA. These teams developed and tested the approaches and strategies together with IRC staff.

The Inter-Institutional Regional Working Groups (IRWGs) formed the **second platform** made up of staff of different institutions involved in the water supply sector in the region. Decisions at this level often needed the approval of political or institutional levels in the region, which were not directly involved in the IRWG. This was one of the reasons for initiating the project in each region with a meeting to inform and win the support of the governor and staff. Technical staff and social scientists became involved in these IRWGs on a voluntary and part-time basis with the approval of their bosses. There were, unfortunately, considerably fewer social scientists, since they constitute a minority group in the institutions. The participatory process helped to develop their capacity to critically analyse the situation and stimulated their creativity and responsibility to take action. Learning continued in the field, where staff from the IRWGs were accompanied by CINARA staff and where community members were also included.

Third level platforms were formed at the community level in each of the 16 participating communities. First, contact was always established with local formal and informal leaders. This was followed by a community meeting to inform as many community
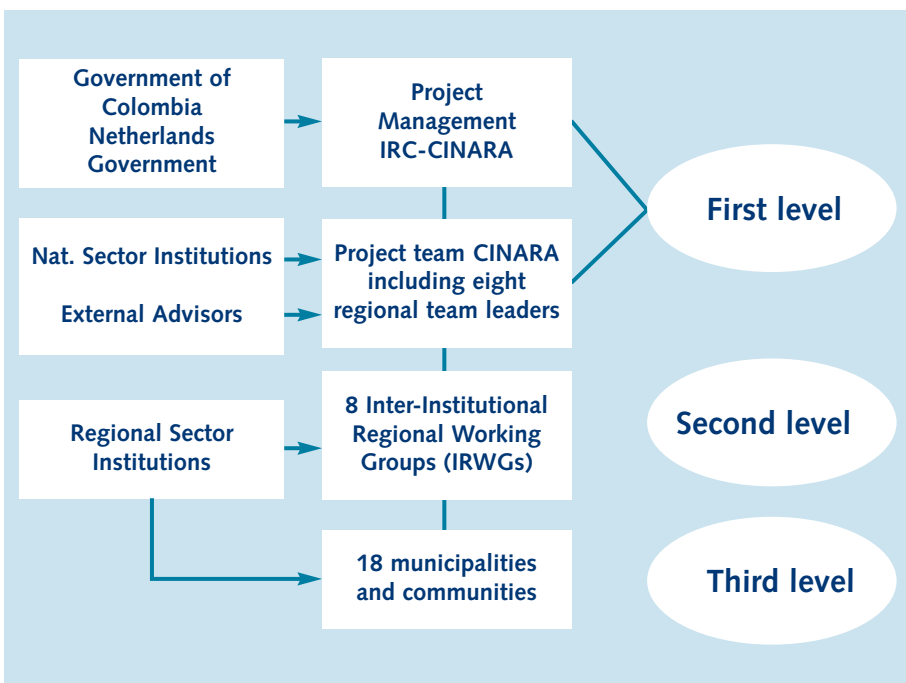

Figure 4.1. Organisation of TRANSCOL with different level platforms

members as possible about the project. Dialogue and interaction between agency staff and communities were stimulated through participatory tools and techniques that helped people to gain insight in their own situation. Horizontal working relations were aimed at, respecting different opinions and stressing that everybody has contributions to make. This approach acknowledged the cultural identity of each community and supported them in reconstructing the history of their water supply. The main activities at community level included house visits, observations, focal group meetings, structured and semi-structured interviews, creative workshops and the formation of support groups. These groups assisted the community organisation responsible for the system to shape the project and monitor the implementation of activities.

Impact and lessons learnt

Important lessons can be learnt from the project, based on the immediate impact (as reflected in the participatory review workshop held in March 1996), and a recent review that included consultations with CINARA staff members, members of the IRWGs in four regions and community members in five communities.

Scaling up MSF technology and TRANSCOL methodology

The TRANSCOL project has led to a horizontal replication ('scaling out') of the technology in Colombia. To date, more than 140 MSF systems have been established in the country, as well as outside. Initially this spread of the technology was strongly stimulated by the staff from the Regional Health Services (RHS), which was leading the sector in most regions and well represented in the IRWG. Unfortunately one year after the end of the project their mandate changed, in the context of decentralisation, from an implementing agency to an organisation responsible for water quality surveillance. This significantly hampered scaling up the development of the institutional framework needed to sustain MSF water treatment. Although some of the staff of the RHS shifted to the private sector and continued to design MSF systems, the necessary supportive framework was weakened instead of strengthened, because the second level platform saw its tasks and responsibilities reduced and the roles of the first level platform ended. This made it very difficult for new communities that had not benefited from the learning in TRANSCOL to sustain their systems, unless they were able to obtain support from organisations such as CINARA.

MSF treatment plant in the community of Santa Ana, Ecuador Picture: Stef Smits

Impact was achieved at national level. The Ministry of Development financed a follow-up project on sustainable water supply with CINARA and came to accept that technology was not the only problem, but that capacity building was also needed. They established a new training project they called 'cultura empresarial' (management culture), that included some of the material developed by CINARA. This project was aimed primarily at municipal water systems and was a considerable change for the government, adopting key aspects that had been part of the management of water supply systems. Implementation however, was only through short courses and did not follow a process approach nor have an emphasis on dialogue. Further steps are needed to truly shift to viewing problems and solutions in a systemic way.

Initial interest in the IRWGs stabilised at lower level
The IRWGs proved to be an effective mechanism to create commitment among staff of relevant agencies to MSF, the community involvement strategy and the interdisciplinary and inter-institutional approach; all needed to create an environment for scaling up. However, it proved difficult to keep the group together. After initial enthusiasm, attendance at meetings started to dwindle. The voluntary nature of participation led to pressure on some staff to give priority to routine work in their own organisations, as the management of some organisations did not attach sufficient value to the learning projects. This seems to confirm the way in which, according to Röling and Jiggins (1998 p 292), social science understands policy makers and scientists. Most policy makers and scientists, usually influenced by economics, tend to ignore learning processes and their facilitation. They view innovation, in this case water supply, as a technical problem. Other members were allowed to continue their work in the IRWGs and did this with enthusiasm making the learning projects a success, although perhaps leaning too much on the core team from CINARA and not taking full benefit of the learning. The end of the project also meant the end of the IRWGs showing that a key driver (in this case CINARA) and financial resources are needed to sustain the effort. This underlines the importance of having a strong link with the policy level; the more so because decisions about resource allocation, even for donor supported activities, are increasingly in national hands.

MSF systems are community managed
To date, almost all MSF plants built under TRANSCOL are managed by water committees. The project has very much stimulated this form of community management because it helped community members to learn about the technology and to deal with related issues such as tariff setting. Most importantly, it helped them to gain self-confidence, as their contributions were valued equally with those of the agency staff.

Most MSF systems from TRANSCOL still operate
Most of the 16 systems are still functioning and are in reasonable shape. Yet, as was confirmed from a visit in 2005, all are in need of some repair, including the replacement of valves and filter sand, and all face operational difficulties in terms of short filter runs because of inappropriate maintenance procedures. In several systems, the applied filtration rate is too high because of inefficient water use, multiple water

use and leakages in the (very old) distribution systems. The good thing is that efforts are being made by various municipalities to renew these systems, even though this is rather costly. Multiple water use for domestic purposes, watering cattle, small scale irrigation and washing coffee beans, seems an important reason to be more concerned with water quantity than quality. Unfortunately, the project did not sufficiently address this issue, as the focus was more on the MSF technology, and it was assumed that people would change their behaviour when the water quality improved. The recent review shows that this seems not to have happened and most MSFs are still operating at excessive filtration rates. In one case this has even led to mixing the water from the plant with untreated water from another source.

Operators make an effort but establish wrong practices
Without adequate supervision and back-up, operators have adjusted operation and maintenance procedures in an undesirable direction, making them actually more difficult, showing that they do not sufficiently appreciate the biological nature of the treatment process. Other operators had no formal training but learnt by getting oral instructions from operators they replaced. Without proper supervision this leaves a lot of room for misinterpretation, as reflected by the way they implement some maintenance procedures. A system is being introduced in Colombia to certify water operators, which may avoid the problems of untrained operators in the future.

The role of operators is crucial, as shown here in Alto de los Ídolos, Colombia.
Picture: CINARA

Learning projects a good approach to capacity building and innovation
Learning projects proved to be a useful vehicle for building the capacity of agency and university staff and community members. Some of the operators and the agency staff

involved in the project still hold their jobs and not only remember TRANSCOL and the very positive attitude of the CINARA staff very well, but also apply some of the things they learnt. Unfortunately, the 2005 review showed that the learning period was too short. The learning project approach has been developed and further consolidated into a Joint Learning Project (JLP) and has been applied by the CINARA team in other projects, and the participatory methods that were developed in the project have been the basis for participatory evaluations by the CINARA team, often in collaboration with IRC in different countries in the region.

The 'school project' in hamlets in a rural area of Cali was such a JLP. This project which uses 'school' as a metaphor for the learning approach embedded in the project, took the concept of joint learning projects emerging from TRANSCOL and applied it to identify water and sanitation problems in rural communities around Cali (CINARA-EMCALI, 1992). This new project established a working group similar to the IRWGs in TRANSCOL and initiated a more consolidated preparatory process than used in TRANSCOL. This process started with an inventory (desk-study) of information available in the different institutions about the area concerned. Subsequently all hamlets in the area were visited to explore potential water supply and sanitation problems. Thereafter, these problems were clustered to identify (typify) and prioritise the most important type of problems. Solutions were proposed for these problems and, together with communities in selected locations, a learning project was established to review the problems in more detail and jointly agree on potential solutions and the roles and contributions of the different actors in the process to develop and test these solutions.

The attractive element of this model is that on the one hand, local solutions are developed systematically for the most pressing problems, while, on the other hand, a soft systems approach is adopted by looking beyond the technical problems. Restrepo (2001) argues that one of the strong points of the learning projects is that problems were prioritised jointly between the community and the institutions. She also claims that the approach has been followed in other projects, which indeed is the case, although it appears that CINARA has been involved as the main driver in all of them. The important lesson seems to be that an external 'facilitator' or facilitating organisation is needed to orient the development of the process. Above all, the facilitator is needed to create the chemistry that allows the sector agencies to collaborate and work together with communities, respecting their right to have their own perspective and to make their own decisions, but helping them to understand options and consequences.

All CINARA staff members who were interviewed in 2005 indicated that TRANSCOL helped them to learn to work in an interdisciplinary way and to work with communities. They also said that, because of their involvement with CINARA, they were able to use this in subsequent projects, although time for learning in these projects was much more limited than in TRANSCOL. In the most recent project, the situation is even more difficult as the implementing agencies seem, once again, to be putting much more pressure on quantitative targets in terms of constructed facilities, than on the broader activities with communities that are essential for the adequate functioning and the sustainability of water supply systems.

CINARA grew as a team and in recognition

TRANSCOL and the parallel research project on pre-treatment technologies provided the opportunity and the resources for CINARA to grow as a team, experiment with the technology and the methodology, build up its information and documentation centre and establish a strong national and international network. This made an important contribution to the development of CINARA as a sector resource centre, with national and international recognition, working in Colombia and other countries in the region.

Universities adopt MSF technology but not the methodology

In four out of the five project regions that were visited in 2005, MSF has become part of the curriculum of universities in the region. This is an important transfer channel as young engineers learn about the technology and field visits are often included in the training. The teachers were all involved in TRANSCOL and some of them have carried out research activities on MSF in their universities. This is a positive development, clearly showing the potential of the university as a transfer mechanism, provided they concern themselves with development projects.

While all teachers agree that the social science component is crucial, they say that they unfortunately cannot include this component in the university programme because of time limitations. The exception was Valle University where the "Community, Culture and Society" course became part of the masters' programme for Sanitary and Environmental engineering in the period 1993–2003 (reviewed by Balvin and Lammerink (2003)), and was well appreciated. Unfortunately, this course was removed when the programme was revised by technology driven university staff in 2003. Balvin and Lammerink comment: "ex-students say …they have learned to identify and solve problems taking into account their social dimension, in a framework of dialogue with institutions and communities, in other words through a dialogue of knowledge. Looking to the curriculum plan… technology in the programme has been conceived as a tool adapted to the needs of its users, the reality of the countries of the region and their sustainable development…. It would seem that the decision to change the curriculum, placing greater emphasis on sanitary engineering, could result in a less holistic programme approach. "
In the other universities, the best that can be offered is a voluntary course dealing with social science aspects, and this only in some universities. This appears to be a similar situation to that in Europe-based universities and training institutions, including those that receive students from developing countries. The fact that the university teachers can take this position is unfortunate, because the importance of the socio-economic component can be demonstrated in a relatively short period of time to at least stimulate the interest of students. The problem has deeper roots; university managements have not really grasped that successful technological change has an important social dimension and needs to be viewed in the context of development.

Reflection

The experience gained in the TRANSCOL project is relevant for other countries, where it may even be more positive, as achievements in Colombia were partly constrained by the difficult situation in several of the project communities because of security

problems in the country and particularly in rural areas. This has led to people leaving their villages (brain drain), putting a strain on the sustained management of the systems. Other communities grew excessively because of the influx of rural dwellers, building pressure for a rapid expansion of the treatment system, which can be more easily accomplished with (less sustainable) chemical water treatment. Some also may have been afraid to participate actively in the project and develop participatory leadership in a political unstable environment. Despite these limiting factors results are positive and clearly show that the TRANSCOL project has many characteristics of a learning alliance as defined by Moriarty *et al.* (2005).

Transcol a learning alliance ´avant la lettre´
The shared interest of TRANSCOL was the diffusion of multi-stage filtration in Colombia, and later on an inter-institutional and interdisciplinary approach to working with communities. The approach valued institutional, academic and community knowledge and promoted mutual respect. This was very much founded in the teamwork of CINARA and IRC staff. Although IRC was responsible to the Netherlands government, decisions were always made as a team in a very transparent environment. Dialogue and experimenting are the key words to characterise the project. The dialogue very much allowed the sharing of views in an open way and stimulated experimentation, with new approaches to find new answers.

Sustaining the learning alliance
Sustaining the core team of the learning alliance (CINARA and IRC) was relatively easy, as financial resources were available from the Dutch government and a clearly shared objective was established that was supported by the management of the participating organisations. Sustaining the IRWGs (the alliances at the regional level), proved much more difficult as they attributed varying degrees of importance to water quality improvement and to working in a participatory way with the community and other institutions, and these competed with daily activities.

At community level, after an initial period of inertia, quite a lot of people became involved. Not everyone did so, if only because the interest in water quality improvement was not fully shared: a number of people were more concerned with water quantity. Sustaining vertical linkages between the different platforms was an important element of the project. This was supported by having the flexibility to adjust the strategy and its implementation schedule. Initially, the project was formulated for three years, but in close consultation with the Netherlands government, the leading funding organisation, it was agreed to take a much more flexible approach. This facilitated the search for local resources, which could be found more easily for the construction of water systems. When this became apparent, the supporting Dutch government ministry, DGIS, agreed to shift funds originally earmarked for construction to training and facilitation, allowing a much longer and more frequent intervention by the teams from CINARA.

The flexibility of the process also allowed for elements of redesign and learning which according to Leeuwis (2004) are essential elements in the scaling up of tailor made

innovations to different contexts and people. After the project came to an end, vertical linkages continued to operate, particularly between the regional health services and communities. But approximately one year later, these came to a halt when the official mandate of the health service changed, from responsibility for rural water supply construction, to surveillance and control, a change that was accompanied by a severe cut in their budget.

Leadership of and facilitation by CINARA essential

The leadership of the CINARA team was crucial for the project and the learning alliance. They developed a new way of working, although they may have been over-enthusiastic in taking the lead. People in the communities remember the staff from CINARA better than they remember inputs from other agencies. This suggests that CINARA staff really learnt to facilitate the work in the regional groups and the communities. This is encouraging because, for many of them, this was their first experience of this approach. The downside is that they were still so new on the job that they allowed fewer learning opportunities for staff from the other agencies to practice as process facilitators. This underscores the importance of facilitation as a key skill for the orientation of learning processes.

Learning project approach has potential

The learning project approach as developed in TRANSCOL has a great deal of potential. It changed the views of the staff involved, making them better professionals with more appreciation for communities and for the importance of interdisciplinary team work. The approach does, however, need fine-tuning to become more effective on an institutional level. This especially means politically embedding the approach to ensure longer-term support and a more comprehensive approach to participatory problem identification at community level, together with agencies that continue to support communities and are prepared to commit to this longer term support. The approach could have worked better if:
• Stronger institutional commitment had been obtained
• A more comprehensive situational analysis had been made, with even more attention given to the logic of social processes and water ecology
• Guidance had been provided for a longer period of time to better learn about the deficiencies.

Change in thinking is essential

TRANSCOL comprises the ingredients for a change in thinking about the need for a more ecologically sound water supply service in which water quality and the social process are taken seriously, but this has not yet materialised. This necessary change can very well be compared with the shift from conventional to ecologically sound agriculture, which often implies a shift from strategic manoeuvring to consensual decision making based on negotiated accommodation of interests and on social learning of new shared perspectives (Röling and Jiggins, 1998). MSF, often the most suitable water treatment process for community water supply using surface water sources, requires this new perspective. It requires, as Leeuwis (2004) calls it, new forms of co-ordinated action and co-operation characteristic of the management of collective natural resources.

An important change is also needed in university education as this has proved an important channel for technology and methodology transfer. It is time for university managements to agree that technological logic is not truly contributing to solving the complex problems of the water sector. This would require giving students a much better understanding of sustainable human development and helping them to grasp the logic of the social processes (interactions between people and people and technology), and the water ecology that is a part of most water treatment.

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Facilitator from the EMPOWERS partnership supporting a problem tree analysis in Palestine
Picture: EMPOWERS partnership

5. Learning alliances for local water resource management in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine: Lessons from the EMPOWERS project

Patrick Moriarty, Peter Laban, Charles Batchelor, Fadi Shraideh, Hazem Fahmy and Sameera Rifai

Summary

The Middle East is a water scarce region, where it is a constant challenge to provide adequate water services. Making this more difficult is a long history of top down management that has largely excluded end-users and other stakeholders from having an effective voice in managing water. The EMPOWERS project is working in governorates in Egypt, Palestine and Jordan to develop locally relevant and owned processes and tools for stakeholder led water management. It is doing this within a learning alliance[1] that involves key stakeholders from national, governorate, and local levels.

Initial experiences are promising, suggesting that the learning alliance approach can indeed lead to local ownership and increased relevance of both tools and approaches. Early indications are that the methodology has the potential to be taken to scale in at least two of the countries. At the same time, many challenges have been faced, including the generally low level of awareness of participatory approaches, lack of decentralised planning systems, and weaknesses within the EMPOWERS team itself. This chapter[2] provides an overview of some of the successes and key lessons learnt of the project in its implementation to-date.

Background and introduction to EMPOWERS

The Middle East is one of the most water scarce regions of the world. It is also has a strong tradition of centralised and top-down governance. Developing a participatory and bottom up approach to local water management in such an environment is, therefore, particularly challenging. Yet this is precisely the objective of the EMPOWERS project, a four year regional programme for local water management in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, funded by the EC MEDA[3] Water Programme and CARE International[4].

The stated long-term goal of the project is to improve development and management of water resources and water and sanitation services at the intermediate and local level

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[1] To avoid introducing a note of confusion into this book, we have used the term learning alliance to refer to the structures we developed in EMPOWERS. However, the project started in 2003, and these structures pre-date the use of the term learning alliance by any of the project partners. Within EMPOWERS we call the learning alliance structures a knowledge community.

[2] This Chapter is based on four EMPOWERS related papers presented at the Symposium on Learning Alliances in Delft, 2005. All four are references at the end of this chapter.

[3] See the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/meda.htm

[4] CARE International and its country offices in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, is the lead partner in the EMPOWERS Partnership.

by promoting increased participation and representation of water users (particularly the most marginalised and underprivileged) in planning and decision-making processes; and by improving the flow and use of information within such processes. In other words, to create the knowledge, attitudes and practices for better, stakeholder-led, water governance[5].

> **Box 5.1. The empowering effects of access to information**
>
> As part of EMPOWERS, the villagers of Rweha were visited by a senior representative of the Jordan Valley Authority, responsible for irrigation water supply. They explained that they had identified through surveys a need for 3m³ of water per dunum (1,000 m²) per day, and asked about increasing their allocation. The director said that they already received more than this. Normally, that would have been the end of the discussion. But the villagers were able to stand their ground, and explain how they knew that they received no more than 2m³ per dunum per day. After a heated discussion, the official left, surprised that the villagers were so clear in their understanding of their problem and not prepared to back down. Source: Shraideh *et al*. (2005)

Involving stakeholders in the management and planning of water services and resources is recognised as a key element in obtaining a balanced and sustainable utilisation of water (GWP, 2000). Whilst the involvement of stakeholders or their representatives in planning processes is clearly desirable, experience has shown that such involvement can be time consuming and fraught with difficulties. These difficulties arise because stakeholders often have conflicting interests and objectives in addressing water-related challenges. Difficulties can also arise as a result of factors that are not directly related to the water sector, such as political tensions, antagonism between different social groups or a lack of respect between specialists and non-specialists. Hence, wide-scale involvement of stakeholders in water resource planning and management is highly desirable, but only if methods and tools are used that are cost effective, lead to conflict resolution, identify tradeoffs between different objectives, and produce outcomes that are measurably better than existing approaches.

While implementing EMPOWERS we have found that despite a rhetorical commitment to decentralisation, many of the prerequisites for its effective implementation, including clear definitions of roles and responsibilities, adequate financing, and necessary technical and organisational skills, are largely lacking. This is not to say that within governorates and districts it is impossible to find qualified staff. From a technical point of view the region has a well developed cadre of engineers and managers. What are lacking are the skills (and often the motivation) to manage: to identify and take decisions, to use information to underpin choices, to look to the future and to plan strategically. More generally lacking in the region are experience with participatory approaches and the involvement and empowerment of grass-root stakeholders in decision making processes.

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[5] Water governance relates to the range of political, social and economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources and the delivery of water services at different levels of society.
EMPOWERS focuses particularly on local water governance - that is governance at levels ranging from the community to district/governorate

In summary, the main barriers that need to be overcome to achieve the objectives are:

• A tradition of centralised, top-down, sector specific planning
• Lack of planning capacity (as opposed to implementation capacity) at decentralised levels
• Lack of experience of dealing with end-users in management processes
• Poor information, fragmented between different stakeholders, with few mechanisms for sharing.

To help to address these challenges and to achieve the project's objectives, a learning alliance structure was adopted to ensure that:

• The methodology was realistic and appropriate given local realities and resources
• The necessary knowledge, attitudes and practices could be developed amongst those who would own and replicate the approach at local and intermediate level
• The approach would be owned by stakeholders and was likely to be replicated widely.

We emphasise that this learning alliance was formed as part of a wider change process aimed at developing what we believe to be a better, more equitable and eventually more effective approach to developing water resources. In this we are clearly backed by the bulk of current policy within the region and countries where we are working. That said, the learning alliances established by EMPOWERS, and in particular the platforms at intermediate and village level, were set up with an explicit change objective in a process that was initiated by outsiders – namely the EMPOWERS partners. The remainder of this paper explores some of the experiences and lessons learnt in developing the framework for local water resource management within such a learning alliance.

Implementation of the project

The EMPOWERS project has a total budget of approximately five million Euros, of which some four million is earmarked for methodology development, and one million for implementing pilot activities on the ground. The current EMPOWERS project has a duration of four year, starting in May 2003.

The guiding philosophy for the work has been one of 'action learning' (as set out in, for example, O'Brien, 1995), underpinning a process of stakeholder dialogue and concerted action (SDCA) between a group of stakeholders from national, intermediate and local level supported by the EMPOWERS team. The programme has been divided into two phases, of roughly two years each: an initial learning phase during which the overall methodology and the skills of the team and key stakeholders were developed in a learning mode, followed by a testing phase in which the draft methodology was replicated. During both phases, approximately annual regional meetings have brought together team members and key stakeholders to reflect on progress to date, to adjust the approach where necessary, and to plan further work. Since the second year of the project 'process documentation' has also been carried out by each country team, to capture the evolution of the process and the way in which people's attitudes and behaviour have changed over time.

Since EMPOWERS started in 2003, the programme has been implemented in the Governorates of Balqa (Jordan) and Jenin (Palestine), and in Ihnazia District in Beni Suef Governorate (Egypt)[6]. Within each governorate/district, approaches and the capacities to implement them were initially developed during the learning phase in two villages and one small town. Subsequently, in the consolidation and testing phase, they are being applied in three more locations in each district. This chapter is written as the four year programme approaches the end of its third year, with the testing phase well underway.

Scope and make-up of the EMPOWERS Partnership team

To provide a feeling for the scale of the activity being undertaken by EMPOWERS, it is worth briefly considering the overall structure of the programme, and the make-up of the country and regional teams implementing it. In fact, as discussed later, neither the structure, nor the process of implementation, is as neat as implied in Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

The overall structure of the programme is of country programmes supported by a regional coordination and information programme as illustrated in Figure 5.1. The regional programme maintains an overview of all the country activities and facilitates the activities shown in Figure 5.1 to ensure inter-country learning. Each country programme in turn carries out similar activities within its own country (not illustrated in the diagram).
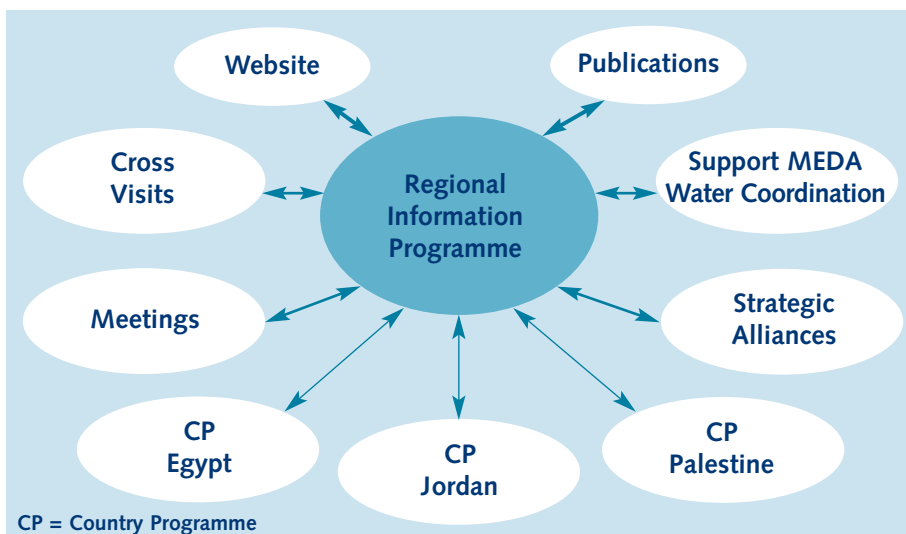

Figure 5.1. Structure and activities of EMPOWERS programmes and teams

Figure 5.2, see below, the structure of the learning alliances within countries – from national to local – and the relationship of the EMPOWERS country team to the learning alliance. Each country team consists typically of one full time 'country coordinator', two full time 'field coordinators' and a full time process documenter.

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[6] The district rather than the governorate was chosen in Egypt because the scale of a governorate in Egypt was felt to be too large. Egyptian governorates have populations of several million, while those in Jordan and Palestine are typically several hundreds of thousands of people. This matches the scale of a district in Egypt.

Staff members in country teams are all full time employees of national partners in the project. In addition, each country team works with a part time professional facilitator. The profiles of country team members vary, but in general all team members are graduates and several have higher degrees. A mix of hard and soft skills in project implementation and research was sought. The gender balance of the teams is good in Palestine and Jordan with a fifty/fifty split. However, in Egypt there is currently only one female member.

These teams have taken the roles of implementer, facilitator, and motivator in each country, as well as being an important part of the learning alliances themselves. The structure and activities of these learning alliances are considered in the next section.

At regional level, the programme is supported by a full time regional coordinator (effectively project manager), a full time regional information officer, and a full time information systems manager. All have graduate or higher level educational backgrounds.

The project is provided with external technical assistance by the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and other specialist input as required. An overview of the partners involved in the learning alliance is given in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Institutional members of stakeholder platforms in EMPOWERS

| Egypt	Jordan	Palestine
• **Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (Gov.)** • National Water Research Centre (Gov.) • **Ministry of Agriculture (Gov.)** • **Potable Water Authority in Beni Suef Governorate (Gov.)** • DRTPC/University of Cairo (Uni.) • Egyptian Water Partnership • CARE Egypt (INGO) • **Ministry of Water and Irrigation (Gov.)**	• Ministry of Agriculture (Gov.) • **Ministry of Social Development (Gov.)** • **Ministry of Interior in Balqa Governorate (Gov.)** • **Ministry of Planning (Gov.)** • INWRDAM (RC) • JoHUD/ZENID (NGO) • CARE Jordan (INGO)	• **Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) (Gov.)** • **Ministry of Agriculture (Gov.)** • **Ministry of Local Government (Gov.)** • **Ministry of Environment (Gov.)** • Palestine Hydrological Group (NGO) • Union of Agricultural Work Committees (NGO) • CARE West Bank and Gaza (WBG) (INGO)

Note: Bold face are key stakeholders at the governorate level; non-bold face are the 12 EMPOWERS partners in the three countries. Gov. = Governmental; NGO = Local non-governmental organisation; INGO = International NGO; RC = resource centre; Uni. = University.

Egyptian girl fetching water
Picture: EMPOWERS
partnership

Learning alliances for SDCA and scaling up

EMPOWERS has consciously adopted a learning alliance model as described in Chapter 1 to structure its learning activities and their eventual uptake and replication. This is illustrated in Figure 5.2, with clear platforms created at national, governorate/district, and local level. The bulk of work on methodological development is carried out at the intermediate level and local levels, with stakeholders from local government working intensively with the EMPOWERS project teams and water users in the pilot villages and towns. The EMPOWERS teams are based primarily in the governorate/district although also maintaining a foothold in the country's capital.
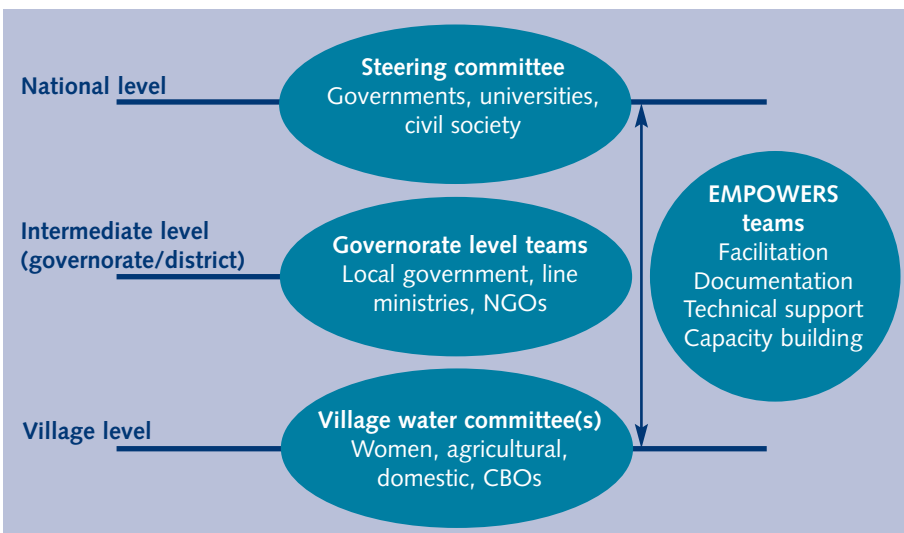
Figure 5.2. The makeup of the EMPOWERS learning alliance: linked stakeholder platforms facilitated by country teams. In EMPOWERS the term 'knowledge community' was adopted, rather than 'learning alliance'.

National level

The national level element of the learning alliances is provided by project steering committees in each country. These committees involve the principal governmental stakeholders at the most senior level, as well as senior representatives of the partners in each country (see Table 5.1), and have been essential in obtaining the necessary authorisations for lower level stakeholders to take part. The steering committees advise EMPOWERS and are already showing themselves to be instrumental in scaling up approaches that have been developed and tested. For example, in Jordan the national level steering committee has managed to attract the interest of the Prime Minister's office, with the result that there is now national interest in replicating the approach in all governorates in the country. In Palestine, EMPOWERS has been invited to assist the Palestine Water Authority (a member of the steering committee) in developing reflections around a future Water Facilitation Body to support the sort of dialogues implemented by EMPOWERS.

Governorate/District level

Table 5.1 gives an overview of the members of the stakeholder platforms established at governorate and district level in each of the three countries. Typically, all of these stakeholders are also represented on the national level committee.

A conscious and structured effort was made to involve stakeholders considered key to implementation and sustainability as early in the process as possible. These key stakeholders were identified at the start of the programme (October – December 2003) and have participated since then in the planning and implementation of all activities. As a result, a very motivated group of key stakeholders are now part of the broader EMPOWERS Partnership, especially in Jordan and Palestine, and they form a central part of the implementation of EMPOWERS activities, especially at the Governorate/District and community levels. The same applies to key representatives of community organisations in the nine selected target communities.

Village/town level

Work in villages and towns has taken place with a mix of individuals and local organisations identified during the early stages of problem identification and subsequently during PRA exercises. As much as possible, EMPOWERS has worked with existing bodies, strengthened with additional competencies where necessary. Nevertheless, it was often necessary to create new bodies, particularly for the representation of women (Box 5.2). It was also often necessary to create more formal representative institutions for water management in the village or town. So, for example, in Jordan local water resources management committees were formed under the umbrella of existing and registered CBOs of which each village has one. Further work has started to identify specific target groups and their possible organisations, especially among women and the poorest sections of the community.

Box 5.2. Ensuring the presence of women and the poor in decision making bodies

The Um Ayash Women Cooperative Society was one of the local community development organisations that was chosen to be the legal umbrella for work in the village. As this was a women's society, the project team sought to encourage men to work with the women as partners and to convince them of the importance of participation and interaction in decision making. Four women were chosen from the society (by the board of directors) and three men from the local community to be in the committee. Because most of the villagers are from two tribes - one is dominant - it was difficult to keep a balance, so the team members increased from seven to nine to include marginalised and less privileged villagers.

Source: Shraideh *et al*. (2005)

Key lessons learnt about using learning alliances in EMPOWERS

This section of the paper briefly describes some of the main lessons learnt in the implementation of the EMPOWERS programme to date, illustrated with examples from work in the three countries. As explained, EMPOWERS is principally concerned with effecting a change in how people work together to manage their water resources and services. We approached this by instigating a series of learning platforms, by working with the platforms to identify key problems associated with water supply and management, by introducing new concepts and tools to these platforms, and then by supporting the stakeholders in the platforms to draw on these concepts and tools to create a locally developed, tested and owned approach to local water governance.

Some of the main tools and concepts include: stakeholder dialogue and concerted action (SDCA), project management cycles, PRA tools, scenario building, and water resource assessments (EMPOWERS 2005 & 2006). All of these have been tried and tested, although experience of their use within the water sector varies. The overall approach to developing the methodology – action research within a learning alliance structure – was completely new to almost all the participants. Dealing with the uncertainties involved in such an approach while at the same time engaging and maintaining the trust and confidence of key stakeholders proved very difficult. The reasons for this and some of the other main lessons learnt so far are presented under a number of headings that deal both with the learning alliance, and with the development of the methodology for improved local water governance. These headings are:
• The role of the country team
• Human resources to support learning alliances
• The need for facilitation during and after EMPOWERS
• Methodological development through action research
• Involving key stakeholders
• Documenting the process.

The role of the country team – facilitator, motivator, implementer, donor and learner

Figure 5.2 shows the role of the EMPOWERS teams as external to the structure of the learning alliance – supporting and facilitating it. However, this does not fully describe

reality. As discussed, while there is clear policy support in all the countries for change in the water sector, and particularly for more integrated, decentralised, and sometimes participatory approaches, the reality is, that in the governorates and districts where EMPOWERS works, neither long term planning nor the participation of end-users were much in evidence. The processes in governorates and districts were therefore initiated and driven forward by the EMPOWERS country teams, at the same time as the teams, together with key stakeholders developed the methodology. The country teams therefore had to operate in both a 'learning' and 'motivating' role. There was no time (or budget) to carry out in-depth capacity building of the core teams prior to beginning to implement the process on the ground.

The core teams faced a steep learning curve themselves, for example on community participation, and their initiating role in getting the project implemented was somewhat at odds with the more independent role required to be a facilitator of the stakeholder process. The consolidation and testing phase is being used to make the shift from implementer to facilitator, as country teams increasingly take a back seat and allow key stakeholders to manage the process themselves. This change is essential for longer term sustainability and replicability.

It has already been noted that the programme included a budget of one million for 'pilot projects', so that some of the plans identified by villagers as part of their strategy development could be implemented. This added yet another role to the job description of the country teams – that of 'donors'. It remains a subject of discussion within the teams whether the presence of this one million Euros, approximately 20% of the total project budget, has been a blessing or a curse. On the one hand, having 'real money' has been important in engaging the interest and buy-in of key stakeholders. On the other it created an additional responsibility for the teams. In Jordan, the team would in future prefer to work without an implementation budget, making it clear from the start that they bring capacity building support for improved planning and management, and expecting their government (or other) partners to find implementation funds. In other countries, having funds to 'show we are serious' continues to be a strongly felt need.

> **Box 5.3. One outcome of the EMPOWERS process: community participation**
>
> Ali Fokha, one of the EMPOWERS committee members, participated in a committee meeting to determine the criteria for selecting beneficiaries. She said: "This is the first time that the community based organisation and other community members have had a main role in project planning. Previous projects came to the community as ready cooked food, which they had to eat as it was, without any participation in preparing it, and without considering if this project was a community priority or not."
>
> Source: Rifai *et al.* (2005)

Water use at household level in Egypt
Picture: EMPOWERS partnership

Human resources to support learning alliances

A learning alliance brings together and facilitates joint learning amongst practitioners, researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders (See Chapter 1). Each EMPOWERS team consists of four full time staff, with specialist input from external national and international experts, to cover the (perhaps too many) functions that have been outlined: methodological development, process facilitation, process documentation and implementation of pilot projects. Given the EMPOWERS approach of using the country teams as the main engine for the change process and the methodological development, such a large team was essential. Data was collected, but has yet to be analysed, on the breakdown of time spent between the different aspects of work in the country teams. Early indications are that the work of process facilitation requires the undivided and full time attention of at least one person, to provide a stable basis for the work of the other team members.

> **Box 5.4. Learning to say 'I don't know'**
>
> For the first year, it was difficult for country teams to experiment with proposed methodologies and adapt them to their own local insights and specific conditions. Instead, the teams waited for a conceptual lead from the regional coordinator or IRC, while the key stakeholders, in their turn, waited for a lead from the teams. The aim was to give the teams more freedom but a frequent complaint from the teams was that lack of direction was "making us look weak in front of key stakeholders". They felt that an open exploratory process implied that key stakeholders would see the team as lacking self-belief and sufficient certainty. Over time this situation changed radically, and the core teams and key stakeholders now take the initiative to adjust tools and methodologies, and take ownership of the process.
> Source: Laban and Moriarty (2005)

A major challenge for the teams was to work in the learning mode required for action research, while at the same time supporting external stakeholders. Action research is relatively new to the water sector generally and participatory approaches generally are almost unheard of in the EMPOWERS countries. The centralised and top-down systems that typify the region do not lend themselves to expressing uncertainty or ignorance; engineers and 'doctors' are expected to maintain and show expertise and control.

The teams' own capacities in process management (facilitation, participation etc.) had to be developed at the same time as the teams began to work to develop some of these same approaches in stakeholders. To allow this to happen, it proved important not to rush the recruitment of staff for the country teams, a process which took over a year. Delayed recruitment and budget revisions made it possible to adapt staff profiles to the needs of an evolving programme. An original specification for a webmaster was converted so to recruit a broader process documentation specialist; while budget lines for technical support were adapted to fund facilitation coaches. In addition, time and money were needed for basic training in the key building blocks of the approach itself.

The need for facilitation during and after EMPOWERS

The participatory planning process being developed by EMPOWERS relies on many qualities, the most important amongst which are the collation and sharing of information, good channels for communication, the capacity of key stakeholders to fulfil their roles and, most important, an ongoing process of open and constructive dialogue between all stakeholders. This last point is crucial as, in the most fundamental sense, water resource management and water service provision are political processes.

It has become evident that embarking on a highly participatory planning process, involving a wide range of different stakeholders at different levels, cannot work without a strong and experienced process facilitator. The stakes are too high, the conflicts of interest too ingrained, and the opportunities for the abuse of power too many. In addition to a full time process manager within the team we therefore identified the need for a high level facilitator in each country. These facilitators were chosen based on their experience, their networks and their standing within the sector. They were also used to coach and strengthen the EMPOWERS teams.

Our experience of the last three years is that, even given a solid start, it is naïve to assume that dialogue can be maintained and facilitated by the stakeholders themselves. We have identified fundamental structural and capacity weakness in both local government and NGOs with regard to the facilitation of participatory processes, which seems to be a general observation for the countries of the Middle East. A long history of centralised and top down management has inevitably disempowered actors at intermediate and local level, so that they are often technically skilled but unused to taking part in planning, decision making, or facilitation processes.

It has become clear that a critical step in ensuring the sustainability of the approaches being developed by EMPOWERS, both for participatory water development, and for future learning alliances, is the identification of host agencies (government, NGO, service providers, or indeed a cadre of professional facilitators) to maintain and carry out the facilitation role over the long term.

In Palestine, the current EMPOWERS partners (PHG, CARE West Bank and Gaza and UAWC) are willing and able to take up such a role. Discussions in Jordan with partners and key stakeholders have led to the Zein Al-Sharaf Institute for Development (ZENID)

becoming a member of the partnership, due to their strong background in facilitation, training and social analysis. They work under the umbrella of JoHUD, a NGO that manages and supports Community Development Centres all over the Kingdom. In recent discussions, led by the national steering committee, the government of Jordan has agreed to look in more detail at the establishment of a national body to assume this role.

Methodological development through action research

The main approach to developing methodology has been, as discussed, action learning or learning by doing. In the first two years (approximately) of the project the country teams, key stakeholders and communities worked together to develop the planning methodology and to test it on themselves. They drew extensively on existing models and tools; the element of innovation was related to how these were brought together and applied, rather than on the development of new tools.

Nonetheless, the capacity of staff (both of country teams and key stakeholders) to absorb and get to grips with the wide range of tools and approaches for such a holistic and integrated approach was over-estimated. Finding the right balance between formal instruction in workshops and seminars, and learning by doing in the field is difficult, and more of an art than a science. Perhaps most difficult was the mental shift needed to get 'implementers' to become 'learners' and 'researchers'. The first 18 months of the EMPOWERS process were marked by a degree of chaos and insecurity, as staff members attempted to learn new skills while at the same time passing these skills on to key stakeholders and communities. Larger budgets for coaching and support by external partners, particularly IRC, between bi-annual field visits would have been useful.

Box 5.5. The benefits of working in a learning mode

Addressing these issues in an explicitly 'learning' mode at the same time as building alliances with and between officials, end users and the EMPOWERS team has proved to be a good approach. Tools and concepts are introduced as they are practiced and applied. Learning by doing makes tools much more practical and as people see results accumulate they can build up to more abstract concepts. For example, learning how to develop a problem tree[7] can be an output, but also more importantly a means of becoming more aware of water resources problems in the community, and of creating a relationship between officials and end users, helping both to see more clearly the importance of communication.
Source: El-Manadely *et al.* (2005)

Nevertheless, this period saw an increase in the confidence of country teams and partners in the learning alliances in the use of the methodologies being developed and piloted. Fine-tuning and clarifying approaches and methodologies was an important learning exercise in the first eighteen months of EMPOWERS. Putting such a planning approach into practice would not have been possible without readjustments and a

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[7] An explanation of the problem tree approach can be found on the EMPOWERS web site at http://www.empowers.info/page/2457 - click on Problem Tree Analysis.

certain degree of confusion. Being involved in the initial stages of developing EMPOWERS methodology and working through processes and problems, while frustrating, has led to greater ownership than would have been possible even in the most intensive training workshop.

The time that has to be invested in developing a methodological approach is certainly justified, as it is leading to the production of key project outputs. The time and effort taken to sharpen vision and understanding of EMPOWERS through initial workshops and work meetings have also proved critical and important investments in the programme.

Involving key stakeholders

Crucial to the whole approach was the involvement of stakeholders in the action learning, particularly those identified as key stakeholders; the people and institutions who are being supported to develop new methodologies that they will (hopefully) own and use in the future. Ensuring their buy-in to the overall process was essential. However, the complexity and expense of doing this was under-appreciated in the initial project proposal. Insufficient thought was given to the practical implications (methodological space, staff and budget) of heavily involving key stakeholders in the programme, and this weakness was addressed in a revised budget approved early in year two. Because the identification and selection of stakeholders is such a critical step, there would have been an increased impact at an earlier stage if there had been more space and staff for preliminary analysis, and more structured hands-on training for country teams in stakeholder analysis tools.

Key stakeholders were involved from the start in the process of developing methodologies, and this enhanced their feeling of ownership. Most are adaptations of existing methodologies (PRA, problem tree analysis, stakeholder analysis, visioning and scenario building, etc). Finding the right mix and sequence is probably most effectively done in a such a learning-by-doing process, again creating greater ownership of the results by all core players. If the project had undertaken prior capacity building of core teams and then introduced the methodologies to other stakeholders afterwards, this may well have taken even more time, and would have been perceived as imposition of outside ideas on government and communities by the key stakeholders in the core teams.

The use of a number of tools, particularly problem trees, visioning and scenario building at Governorate and village levels was instrumental in key-stakeholders buying in to the process and in sharing and structuring of ideas. It was an eye-opener for government officials to see that it is possible and effective to discuss such issues

> **Box 5.6. Lack of contact between officials and users**
>
> One of the officials in the Water Authority stated that it was the first time he had visited the village during his 20 years of service, although it was in his work domain. It was a new experience for him to deal directly with the public and to take a good look at the problems in real life.
> Source: Shraideh *et al.* (2005)

openly and across institutional boundaries. The open ambiance of the participatory stakeholder workshops and meetings proved helpful in finding shared opinions and building commitment to the programme.

Documenting the process

For a programme that is in essence driven by a process approach it is essential to take the necessary time and to make structured efforts to fine-tune, learn, internalise and further innovate the proposed approaches and methodologies with core partners and key stakeholders.

The strongest arguments for the EMPOWERS approach are participatory and inclusive planning, information sharing between levels and sectors, and stakeholder approaches. This will however only become clear through positive examples that can be clearly seen as leading to 'better' outcomes than existing approaches. Looking for and defining success stories due to the work of the team are key activities for the second phase of EMPOWERS. However, process documentation is very new as an integral part of development projects and there are very few elaborated examples in the world. Staff who are documenting processes in EMPOWERS are having to pioneer solutions for how to identify target(s) of information, get the right balance between formal assessment and advocacy, produce different versions of information for different audiences and so on.

Conclusions and challenges

Identifying institutional homes for facilitation skills

The greatest challenge facing EMPOWERS country teams is to ensure the smooth transition from a (so far successful) externally funded project to a nationally owned and sustainable process based on participatory strategic planning processes at village/town and governorate/district level.

A particular challenge is posed by the need to ensure the continuity and continued legitimacy of the role of process facilitator in supporting stakeholders at governorate and end-user level to work together effectively. At this point, we believe that, to ensure legitimacy, it will be necessary for this facilitation role to be carried out by an independent actor or institution. Identifying who will fill this role in the long term is a great challenge for the project, but one that is already under way in Jordan and Palestine. It is also a challenge to encourage demand to the extent that stretches to paying realistic market rates for facilitation services.

Developing the skills of the country teams – an engine for sustainability and change

It has taken nearly two years to develop both the methodology, and the capacity of the project teams to implement it, to the point where the teams, whose staff are drawn from an alliance of local and regional organisations, are competent and confident enough to apply the methodology without external support. The next step is to spread this knowledge to other stakeholders within EMPOWERS governorates and districts, and in the longer term more widely within their countries.

In Chapter 1, Smits *et al.* talk about the need for a learning alliance to have an 'engine' to move it forward. A group of people who have a vision of how progress can come about and who encourage and support others in working towards it can be such an engine, and in this case it is the individuals rather than the institutions who are critical. However, this engine has to be created.

The ideal would be to enable every member of the alliance to be fully involved in the process of learning. In reality some are always keener on change than others; some actively lead, while others resist. In each country, we have seen this evolve differently, with initial involvement often based on personal likes and interests as on institutional structures and decisions. It remains to be seen how long it will take to turn the original 'vision' of a very small group of individuals writing a project proposal to EC MEDA, into a concrete, widely applied approach, in a relatively large group of people with diverse institutional and professional backgrounds and the skills to apply it, scattered across three countries and with a regional/international element.

Over the two years of project implementation, we have seen that the relative weight of partners in developing the innovation has changed. In the early days, the main conceptual drive was external. The first task in developing the learning alliance was to develop country teams and their capacity to take on the primary roles of facilitator, motivator and implementer of the process. This has now been largely achieved, and the role of the external partners has changed to one of timely support. The next step is for the country teams – and their closest national collaborators – to go through the same process with the wider group of governorate and national stakeholders. Developing the skills and tools for a genuine participatory planning process that can be replicated in a cost- and time-effective way is probably a longer process than a four year project. The project is primarily a catalyst in getting the wider process going; in developing some of the initial instruments necessary to do so; and, most importantly, in generating buy-in and demand for both instruments and process.

Summary: the overall effect of using a learning alliance approach within EMPOWERS
The learning alliance structures (which within EMPOWERS we call a knowledge community) were adapted because we could see no other way to make a success of the project: to engender real change in how water is managed required the development of tools and the capacities and attitudes to use them. To give this more than local impact required the creation of a structure to own and scale-up these approaches.
It is still early to say how successful this has been. What we can say is that, after three years, we have good qualitative indications of success within pilot governorates, districts, towns and villages. Key stakeholders remain keen and involved, water users attend meetings, with very satisfactory increases in the involvement of women. Members of different platforms readily express satisfaction at the improved levels of communication. Government and NGO partners are adopting the strategic planning methodology for use in other non-water related programmes and activities. At national level, at least in Jordan and Palestine, there are clear indications of high level

interest in the adoption and replication of elements of the approach (Palestine) or the entire approach (Jordan). Finally, the EMPOWERS project has been externally evaluated and highly praised by the main donor – the European Commission.

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The District Sanitation Task Team from Central District Municipality meets in the municipal offices of Tswaing Local Municipality in Delareyville (North West Province) Picture: Rowan Duvel

6. Building a learning water services sector through collaboration: The South African experience[1]

Kerry Harris, Louise Colvin, Thoko Sigwaza, Ndala Duma and Nandi Mayathula-Khoza

Summary

In South Africa, a concerted effort to build an organised water and sanitation sector in the post-Apartheid era has led to an enabling environment for learning and knowledge sharing. This was enhanced with the introduction in 2001 of a sector wide approach programme (SWAP) called Masibambane ("let's work together"). The concept of a learning alliance[2] was not pursued as such. Rather, key elements of a learning alliance emerged organically. Amongst other reasons, these elements were developed to break horizontal barriers to information sharing, and to promote joint learning at the local government level on water services delivery. In addition, an effort is made to develop vertical links, for example through the establishment of the Water Information Network – South Africa (WIN-SA). This network of sector organisations, government, NGOs and knowledge institutes aims to enhance vertical sharing of lessons between national level and decentralised organisations, both government and non-government, and to institutionalise lesson sharing.
The focus has been on scaling up, as well as on innovation and lessons learning. Masibambane was implemented initially in three of the nine provinces, where the service backlog was greatest, and is now being scaled up to all nine provinces. Scaling up involves establishing structures for collaboration, as well as systems for exchanging information and sharing lessons.

This chapter traces the setting up of collaborative processes at national, provincial and local levels in South Africa over the last five years, which led to the emergence of the learning water sector. It examines the drivers and resources mobilised, and the way that the learning agenda has been institutionalised. Finally, it looks at lessons learnt from this experience, and possible ways forward for this learning alliance.

Introduction: water services in South Africa

Re-defining governance
South Africans participated in their first democratic elections for national government in April 1994, giving rise to the Government of National Unity. In the first five years, and to a lesser extent thereafter, numerous new policies were developed and legislation enacted.

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[1] This chapter was developed from the paper presented at the 2005 Symposium on Learning Alliances in Delft (Sigwaza, *et al.*, 2005).

[2] In this chapter, a learning alliance adopts the concepts and definitions described in the background paper presented at the Symposium on Learning Alliances in Delft (Moriarty *et al*., 2005).

The Constitution promulgated in 1996, mandated local government to be responsible for service delivery, including water supply and sanitation. Local government carries the primary responsibility for addressing poverty and improving living conditions. This massive responsibility was ever more challenging in the face of fundamental restructuring and transformation. An initial 804 transitional local and rural councils were established with the aim of ensuring wall to wall local government and direct accountability to communities. Due to lack of institutional capacity, this proved unworkable and in 2000 a re-demarcation process established 284 municipalities (six metropolitan, 47 districts and 231 local). Following the 2000 local government elections, service provision began to be consolidated under these new municipal structures. However, this major decentralisation effort faces numerous difficulties as many municipalities lack critical resources, skills and capacities.

As the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (2005) states in its Preamble: "one of the most pervasive challenges facing our country as a developmental state is the need for government to redress poverty, underdevelopment, marginalisation of people and communities and other legacies of apartheid and discrimination". The development environment is particularly difficult, being in a state of constant change as politicians, government officials, communities and development practitioners strive to ensure progressive realisation of human rights.

South Africa has a vibrant civil society. In 1994 there were approximately 45,000 NGOs operating in various sectors. This number decreased substantially as donors switched funding to government departments. However, many civil society organisations (CSOs) are still engaged in advocacy and in holding government accountable to the people. Many service provider NGOs implement and manage projects and services, usually on contract to government. Research, pilots and innovation, policy development and capacity building are all to some extent carried out by NGOs. There is also a range of education and training institutions and professional bodies.

Water and sanitation services

Water and sanitation services[3] in South Africa are characterised by sophisticated and high levels of service in cities, towns previously reserved for white people, and some former 'black townships', and a lack of basic services to the poor, mostly in ex-Bantustans[4] and rural areas. With the abolition of forced separation, there has been mass migration to the cities, including an estimated three million illegal immigrants from other African countries in search of work. This has put a strain on the inadequate and ageing water and sanitation infrastructure, especially in the former 'black townships', and in catering for new informal settlements. Despite greater institutional

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[3] Water services are defined in the Water Services Act (1997) as including both potable water supply and sanitation.
[4] Bantustans were part of the "Homeland System" set up by the apartheid government (different Bantustans for different tribal groupings), demarcated for black people only. Many people in these areas had been forcibly removed from "white" areas, and were governed by black leaders put in place by the government.

clarity, water services provision continues to be fragmented – undertaken by municipalities, commercial enterprises (mills, mines, farmers etc), CBOs often with support from NGOs, regional water utilities and, in some cases, the national Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF)[5].

In 1994 there were 15.2 million people (40% of the population) without access to basic water supply, and 20.5 million people (51% of the population) without access to basic sanitation. Of these unserved people, 70% lived in rural areas.

In 1994 DWAF took over water services responsibilities in many areas in the absence of any capacitated local authority. During this period water services policy and legislation were established, but the role of DWAF in direct service provision (which included operations and investment) was seen as a temporary measure. DWAF inherited the operations of 315 bulk and 1,032 rudimentary schemes hitherto run by ex-Bantustan departments. DWAF set up and drove the Community Water Supply and Sanitation (CWSS) Programme focusing on access to basic services in rural areas where capacity was weak, while the national government Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) drove the Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme (CMIP) focusing on urban and more capacitated areas.

With decentralisation in 2000, direct responsibility for service provision began to pass to municipalities. In 2003 changes to powers and functions resulted in 155 municipalities being given water services authority (WSA) status. This presented another major challenge for municipalities. On top of the unrelenting pressure of delivering on the government's service delivery targets, local councils now had to shift their paradigm, grapple with and establish the authority function and reconstitute their institutional arrangements, particularly in relation to the provider function. This is a key aspect of the water services institutional reform process that is currently under way.

From 2000, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) began to assume a clearer role in representing, organising and supporting municipalities, including all aspects of service delivery. It was becoming an increasingly important and prominent partner in the water services sector.

DWAF, working with DPLG, SALGA and the National Treasury, had to redefine its role with more focus on support and capacity development and, eventually, regulation – rather than on direct service provision. Figure 6.1 indicates the past, present and future roles of DWAF.

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[5] Schemes still operated by DWAF are part of a national programme to be transferred to the appropriate authority - in most cases the municipality under whose jurisdiction they fall.
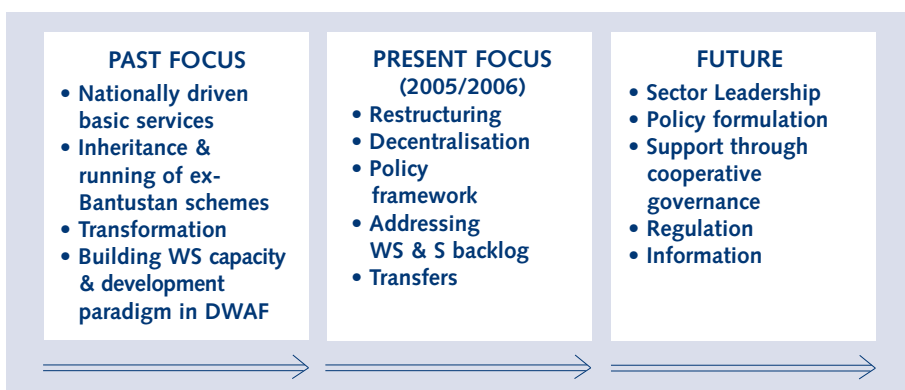
PAST FOCUS	PRESENT FOCUS (2005/2006)	FUTURE
• Nationally driven basic services • Inheritance & running of ex-Bantustan schemes • Transformation • Building WS capacity & development paradigm in DWAF	• Restructuring • Decentralisation • Policy framework • Addressing WS & S backlog • Transfers	• Sector Leadership • Policy formulation • Support through cooperative governance • Regulation • Information

Figure 6.1. Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in transition

To fulfil its future role, DWAF must focus on building its own capacity for "developmental regulation" as its core business for water services over the next decade – and on assisting the sector in its transition to new water services institutions, with the central focus being WSAs. As sector leader, DWAF carries responsibility for ensuring that sector members fulfil their rightful roles within a coherent policy and strategic framework. This includes the wide-ranging mix of water services providers (WSPs), from water utilities to community-based providers, NGOs, private sector companies, including community-based small medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), training institutions and research bodies.

Sector policy and legislation

Policies, legislation and regulations at national level began to provide an enabling environment for water services delivery by defining sector roles and collaboration imperatives. These include:

Water Services Act (1997). This Act aims to provide a supportive regulatory structure by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of sector institutions:
• DWAF is established as having national monitoring and regulatory functions.
• The WSA is defined as any municipality designated as responsible for ensuring water services. This governance authority cannot be delegated.
• The WSP actually provides water services to consumers. This can be the WSA itself, another municipality, a water utility, a community-based structure, an NGO or a private enterprise.
• The relationship between WSAs and WSPs must be formalised by means of a contract.

Strategic Framework for Water Services (2003). This policy document brings together all policies developed by the sector between 1994 and 2003, and sets out a vision for achieving national sector targets, as well as a way forward for the development of strategies for sector support, regulation, and the rationalising of sector institutions. It confirms DWAF's role as sector leader and regulator.

Collaboration in the water services sector[6]

Roots of collaboration

Transformation from a centralised, hierarchical and autocratic form of government to a new democracy ushered in a new way of working, driven by principles of consultation, transparency, accountability and democratic processes. This new culture laid the basis for sector collaboration. Sector collaboration had its beginnings in two early, pre-1994 structures, set up to ensure equitable services under the new government. The Drought Forum and the Standing Committee on Water Supply and Sanitation (SCOWSAS) each brought together a wide cross-section of actors and entrenched a community-based approach, making an important contribution to the ability today of the sector to remain ahead of other development and service sectors. From 1994, DWAF made funding available to formalise collaboration. Early structures set up by the Department included the Provincial Liaison Committees, Area Planning Forums[7] and the National Sanitation Task Team (NSTT)[8].

Community members in Ngedlengedle in KwaZulu-Natal province work together to dig trenches for their water supply system
Picture: Stef Smits

[6] Some of the organisations and institutions described in this section are still under development. This section gives the status of these institutions at the time of writing of the chapter.

[7] Forums were set up in all nine provinces to assist with prioritising new projects, budget allocation per province, oversight of feasibility studies, etc. Forums differed in their representation, but usually included the Office of the Premier, regional DWAF offices and provincial departments such as health and the environment.

[8] A National Sanitation Coordinating Office (NaSCO) was based at DWAF, and provincial sanitation task teams were established, all with representation from various national government departments and NGOs.

Formalising collaboration: Masibambane

The political imperative to deliver services often demanded a supply-driven approach – a criticism made in many evaluations of the CWSS Programme. It was openly acknowledged that infrastructure programmes to address service backlogs were not sustainable as long as they were driven from national government level. Municipalities needed to be empowered to take up this responsibility, ensuring local level service delivery and accountability to consumers.

In 2000, with impending decentralisation of water services delivery to local government, a sector wide approach was recognised as timely and appropriate. Masibambane was fundamentally about changing power relations, building a more organised sector, promoting leadership and governance at the appropriate levels, collaborative planning and ensuring informed decision-making. It also aimed to ensure coordinated sector support by bringing together efforts and money from various funding streams (national government, local government and donors) in ways that enabled a range of sector role players to have a stake in how the money was allocated.

Masibambane was launched in April 2001, with strong leadership from DWAF, at national level and in the three provinces where the combined water services backlog constituted 80% of the national backlog, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. A Masibambane Coordinating Committee (MCC) was set up, (now functioning as the Water Services Sector Quarterly Meeting) with an operational mandate to support and oversee national coordination and to report on sector strategies and provincial Multi-Annual Action Plans (MAAPs)[9]. It comprises SALGA and DPLG (co-chairs), DWAF, provincial forum representatives (drawn mainly from local government), civil society and donors.

Masibambane was premised on the three provincial MAAPs, through which three themes emerged:

- **Sector orientation** – ensuring an appropriate policy framework, approaches and mechanisms for implementation
- **Service delivery** – ensuring a sustainable programme based on integrated planning
- **Institutional support** – supporting all three spheres of government and other players to fulfil their water services functions, with a strong focus on building the institutional capacity of WSAs.

Masibambane acted as a catalyst for the development of DWAF's Three Year Strategic Plan 2004-2007 and the Strategic Framework for Water Services, and re-aligned sector reporting against MAAP focus areas and deliverables.

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[9] These were developed as three-year water services plans in the province. They were initially called MAAPs, and are now called Provincial Water Services Sector Plans.

Elements of SWAP

Masibambane contained the six components of a traditional SWAP:

• Government-led process of donor coordination
• Clear and agreed sector policy and strategy
• Sector framework for expenditure from all local and external resources
• Systematic mechanism for consultation of beneficiaries
• Common performance monitoring and reporting
• Agreed process for harmonising systems.

Growing role of SALGA and other role players

The Masibambane Programme built capacity in SALGA – at national level, as well as in selected provinces. Salaries were made available for full time staff. Donor money funded the first Core Councillor Training Programme (CCTP) for new councillors after the December 2000 local government elections. Money was also made available for setting up the Local Government Knowledge Sharing Programme (KSP) and networks for Municipal Managers – web-based, generic programmes of support for municipalities.

SALGA emerged as a strong voice for organised local government, and was able to influence thinking in the sector in a completely new way. It was key, along with the South African Association of Water Utilities (SAAWU) and others, to the development of a sector communications programme, as well as the drafting of sector policies and strategies.

NGOs were represented on the MCC from the start, including SANGOCO (the South African NGO Coalition) the Rural Services Network and The Mvula Trust, the biggest water services NGO in the country. National bodies included the National Community Water and Sanitation Training Institute (NCWSTI), the Water Research Commission (WRC), the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Water Institute of South Africa (WISA), the Southern African Institution for Civil Engineering (SAICE), the Institute for Municipal Engineers of South Africa (IMESA) and SAAWU.

A Masibambane Civil Society Support Programme (Klarenberg and Masondo, 2005) was set up to try to improve the disappointingly low involvement of civil society. Community orientated service provider NGOs play a diminishing role in water and sanitation delivery programmes, due primarily to the fact that most municipalities do not recognise their value, even though legislation clearly articulates a role. Municipalities generally opt for a fast track, top-down mode of delivery to meet their ambitious targets, usually at the expense of sustainability and community buy-in.

Setting up provincial forums

Masibambane sector forums were established in the three provinces to provide strategic direction, improve coordination and integration, oversee the development and implementation of provincial MAAPs, and build institutional capacity and operational sustainability. Allocations of the capital programme budget were discussed in these forums – the initial primary motivator for collaboration. These forums are

comprised mainly of WSAs, and include regional DWAF staff, and representatives from provincial government departments.

The forums create a platform for dialogue concerning implementation challenges within the municipal environment, such as lack of policy coherence and issues of sustainability, and provide reporting mechanisms for comparisons between municipalities and provinces.

Provincial forums are represented on, and report to, the national MCC, a platform where they can learn from others and monitor their comparative progress. National DWAF staff attend provincial forums and ensure that issues, constraints and lessons that arise there are addressed.

Although they were not designed as such, provincial forums can be likened to the intermediate level platforms outlined by Smits *et al.* in Chapter 1. They bring together a range of stakeholders (mainly local government) at decentralised level, in a facilitated space.

Scaling up from three provinces to nine

Phase II of Masibambane started in April 2004, extending to all nine provinces. A primary aim of Masibambane II was to ensure lesson sharing within and between sector structures, including lessons on collaboration, to enable the scaling up of sector approaches across the country. It became increasingly clear that it would be important to support and build the informal learning alliance that was emerging.
With the advent of the Municipal Infrastructure Grant in 2004/2005, DWAF no longer held the purse strings, and it was feared that the motivation for collaboration would dwindle. In fact, participants identified the exchange of experiences, sharing lessons between peers and being better informed about national initiatives as obvious benefits of collaboration. Masibambane II would need to place greater emphasis on improving the quality of knowledge sharing, while extending it beyond informal exchanges between those sitting around the same table.

Since each province has different priorities and structures, there is no blueprint. However, there are many opportunities to introduce methodologies, share learning experiences, and provide information back up and support to entrench a learning culture.

The establishment of the WSSLG

As a natural progression in the collaborative sector approach, the Water Services Sector Leadership Group (WSSLG) was set up in 2001 – bringing leadership together to articulate a common vision and to provide strategic guidance to the sector. The WSSLG is a national sector think-tank, seeking to align the vision and work of the sector with national objectives and sector goals. It meets twice a year to influence policy, set priorities and obtain consensus. The WSSLG is inclusive both of executive and political functionaries, national non-government structures (large and small), and the private sector. Greater emphasis is being given to systematic representation of sector forums from provincial and local levels, and to ensuring feedback to the forums.

By the end of 2001, the sector therefore had the following collaborative structures which resemble learning platforms:
• WSSLG – to provide strategic guidance for the sector
• MCC – to oversee sector work plans and reporting at national level
• Provincial sector forums – to plan, budget and implement Provincial Water Services (Strategic) Plans / MAAPs – with municipalities as the primary drivers.

Reflections on the structure

The concept of a learning alliance has never been the basis for developing these structures. However, driven by the need to collaborate, the sector started to develop structural elements which characterise a learning alliance. Linkages are made between different levels: local government, provinces and national level, especially because of the way Masibambane has been set up. Provincial forums and the WSSLG are the platforms where sector players meet. They are supposed to bring together multiple stakeholders, with government in the driving seat, but it can be argued that especially at provincial level, the participation of NGOs and knowledge institutes is limited.

Prioritising networking and lesson sharing

As services are extended, the workload increases, highlighting a dire skills shortage, particularly in engineering, technical and management fields. This is most acutely felt in newly established, mainly rural municipalities. The most seasoned expertise lies in metropolitan areas and water utilities, who themselves are overstretched. A human resource development programme is the answer in the long term, but in the meantime, is it essential that the sector is able to draw upon this expertise.

There has for a long time been a wealth of knowledge in the sector which was not disseminated or shared very effectively. For example, opportunities to use DWAF's National Information System more widely for planning in the sector were not being exploited. On the other hand, a number of networks that lend themselves to facilitating knowledge sharing had emerged.

It was timely, therefore, when in December 2002, the WSSLG identified knowledge management, best practice promotion and information dissemination as necessary to accelerate learning and uptake of good practice and key components of sector support. These were key components articulated in the widely consulted Strategic Framework for Water Services (DWAF, 2003). At the same time two other important initiatives coalesced. The IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre was funded by the Dutch Government to coordinate a five year Resource Centre Development (RCD) Programme to strengthen resource centres in 18 countries worldwide, with South Africa as one of the participating countries. In addition, the British funded Department for International Development (DFID) identified knowledge management as a key output of its Water Services Support Programme, and provided a budget to support such work.

Setting up WIN-SA

A comprehensive process of stakeholder consultation about knowledge management, best practice promotion and information dissemination began with an inception workshop in February 2003, which established a steering committee and working group. A position paper (WIN 2003) gave clarity on the background, objectives, content and future direction of this initiative, which came to be known as the Water Information Network – South Africa (WIN-SA). The position paper and WIN-SA's sector mandate was ratified by the WSSLG in June 2003. The results of a DFID-funded study into information needs for municipal water services were used as a basis for developing a Business Plan (completed in October 2004) to access funding from Masibambane. WIN-SA has since been set up as a functioning unit hosted by the WRC, with a staff of four (Strategic Advisor, Coordinator, Web Manager and Administrator).

Mission and vision
The vision of WIN-SA is "a well-organised and informed sector able to effectively deliver water supply and sanitation services to the people of South Africa". The mission of WIN-SA is "to facilitate the creation of a well-managed body of knowledge in the sector. This knowledge has to be readily accessible and applied, leading to improved decision-making and performance, especially of local government".

Governance and accountability
The Steering Committee has been chaired by the WRC, and comprises the founding members – DWAF, DPLG, SALGA, The Mvula Trust, the NCWSTI and SAAWU. It was supported by DFID, and continues to be supported by the IRC (as co-facilitator), and Masibambane. WIN-SA is accountable to the WSSLG, as well as to a Reference Group that allows for a broader spectrum of participation. There is a proposal for a new Steering Committee to provide greater sector representation.

Target group
The primary target group is municipalities (councillors and officials), specifically those requiring extra knowledge to implement water services. Much of the expertise and many of the lessons are to be found in local government – so the emphasis is on two-way processes of collecting and disseminating information and knowledge across the sector.

Focus areas
WIN is guided by a three year Business Plan (Win, 2005) with the following focus areas:
1. Strengthening learning networks in the sector, to capacitate the Network, whilst ensuring synergy across sector knowledge management initiatives. WIN-SA is responsible for identifying knowledge gaps, and taking leadership to fill them.
2. Managing a knowledge dissemination facility. This focuses primarily on growing the WIN-SA portal to be an information collection, dissemination and access point. Other activities include a sector database, newsletter and "intelligent mailing list".
3. Supporting sector lesson learning and sharing to give substance to the Masibambane Lesson Learning Framework (van Huyssteen and Oranje 2004). This focuses on providing back up for knowledge management needs, especially at

provincial level. It includes a Bringing in the Harvest Campaign documenting stories, lessons and experiences (Figure 6.5), organising exchange visits, "learning journeys" in which local government and other officials visit communities in South Africa or other countries, and building capacity within key structures in order to institutionalise knowledge sharing in the sector. Ways are being explored of sharing knowledge more widely throughout Africa.

Figure 6.2. WIN-SA's key focus areas, products and services

Again, the learning alliance framework did not serve as a model for WIN-SA, but the principles emerged out of the need to learn, innovate and scale up innovations.
It brought in the two key outcomes of an LA: developing and institutionalising new knowledge. It has also started to become a platform for different types of stakeholders to come together, including government, NGOs and knowledge institutes.

Participants at the WIN-SA Partners Forum
Picture: WIN-SA

Reviewing sector collaboration

External evaluations highlighted Masibambane as one of the most successful SWAP programmes internationally. In 2005 a major sector collaboration review was undertaken to document and review sector collaboration. The review (Jones and Williamson, 2005) was managed by WIN-SA, and provided an opportunity to understand what had made the collaboration successful, and how lessons could be taken forward. Parts of this chapter draw on that review.

Lesson learning as a key motivating factor

In 2005, stakeholders identified information sharing and lesson learning as a key motivating factor and benefit for continued participation in sector structures and processes. This had not been considered a benefit at the outset, when the primary motivation was to access funding. This is reflected in the responses by a cross-section of stakeholders in the Eastern Cape Province, who were asked what their individual or organisational motivation for collaboration had been in 2000, and 'now' (2005).

Table 6.1. Drivers for collaboration – results of stakeholder interviews in the Eastern Cape

Drivers for collaborating	2000	2005
Lesson learning	0%	63%
Working together	63%	25%
Legal mandate	0%	25%
Delivery capacity	62%	100%
Sector leader	25%	25%
Achieve results	100%	75%
Money	35%	0%

By 2005, understanding and responding to current needs and issues had become a strong motivating factor for collaborating. The review notes that lesson sharing and benchmarking, with comparative learning, are key motivating factors – although initially entirely absent from the agenda of provincial forums.

However, a lack of commitment to collaboration remains a barrier at times. People understand what collaboration is about, but do not always prioritise it amongst the myriad of demands on their time and resources. Capacity to collaborate is also still a major challenge.

Why collaboration succeeded

The review highlighted several reasons for the success in achieving collaboration:
• Collaboration was built on solid foundations such as the CWSS and donor programmes
• It concentrated on supporting municipalities and, in some forums, an effort was made to include councillors
• It moved with the trend of legislation and was forward looking

- There were good relationships and understandings between key individuals at the outset
- DWAF provided strong leadership, and was able to build capacity within partner organisations, for example, enabling SALGA to grow into its role as the organised voice of municipalities
- 'Honest brokers', perceived to be acting without vested interests, played a vital role in the early stages
- Flexible funding was made available to address tangible issues and projects (e.g. MAAPs and WSDPs)
- DWAF, as sector leader, saw the benefits of collaboration and was willing to compromise
- Attention was paid to the structures that framed collaboration, and there was a willingness to review these and other 'process' issues.

What the review taught us

The review pointed out that although national efforts around knowledge management had started, they were still 'top down' in their approach, and couched in academic terminology. Learning becomes possible when people realise that knowledge management and sharing lessons is not 'rocket science', but can and should happen every day in the course of the job.

Target beneficiaries had begun to appreciate that, by collaborating around strategies, planning and reporting, the true value had become the platform for exchanging experiences and lessons. As collaboration matured, participants were better able to articulate their needs and demands and, therefore, could better seek appropriate support. Further, as stakeholders became better informed about national and provincial initiatives and were able to see the whole picture and linkages between levels, learning from peers was greatly enhanced.

Collaboration was found to break down 'silos' and sector members become aware of where to go for information and knowledge. The challenge becomes the need to maximise these opportunities and strengthen the culture of learning.

Meetings, workshops and verbal exchanges are the modus operandi in South Africa, and decisions are made under pressure and quickly. It is necessary to build on these processes and to work smarter, by ensuring good agendas, facilitation of participation and sharing, identifying and capturing lessons and good practice, and by setting aside time to review and analyse information and give feedback.

Of great importance was the finding that sector support, collaboration and knowledge sharing were both interdependent and mutually supportive, as shown in the example in Box 6.1.

Emergence of a sector learning approach

Partly based on the review, Masibambane developed a draft Lesson Learning Framework to help to institutionalise lesson sharing in the provinces. WIN-SA took over responsibility for finalising the draft framework, and included it in its Business Plan. The Sector Learning Framework (2005) seeks to demystify and build a practical understanding of knowledge sharing so that a culture of learning can be more readily and widely adopted.

The concept of a learning sector
A learning sector implies that all those in it are readily able to access and apply information, and to continue to learn and develop from sharing experiences and lessons. Everyone has something to learn and something to share and there are many different ways of learning and sharing – appropriate to different circumstances. The framework document depicts the learning sector with three interlinked and inter-dependent elements (Figure 6.3). Support is critical for an organised and well functioning sector, knowledge management and sharing underpins effective support, and neither could take place without collaboration.

Challenges in building a learning sector
There are many challenges to building a learning sector in South Africa. Perhaps the most difficult is that the majority of municipalities, five years after the first democratic local government elections, are still battling to come to grips with their governance and service delivery functions. They are, by and large, still over-stretched and under-

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[10] In October 2005, 87 municipalities did not even have a single technical staff person on their payroll, according to Water Affairs and Forestry Minister Buyelwa Sonjica.

resourced[10]. Most actors in the sector have been on steep learning curves as they face the challenges of transformation, decentralisation, restructuring and change – with little time or understanding of the need to ensure that lessons from those experiences are shared. Under these pressures it is important to minimise 'reinventing the wheel' and making the same mistakes repeatedly.
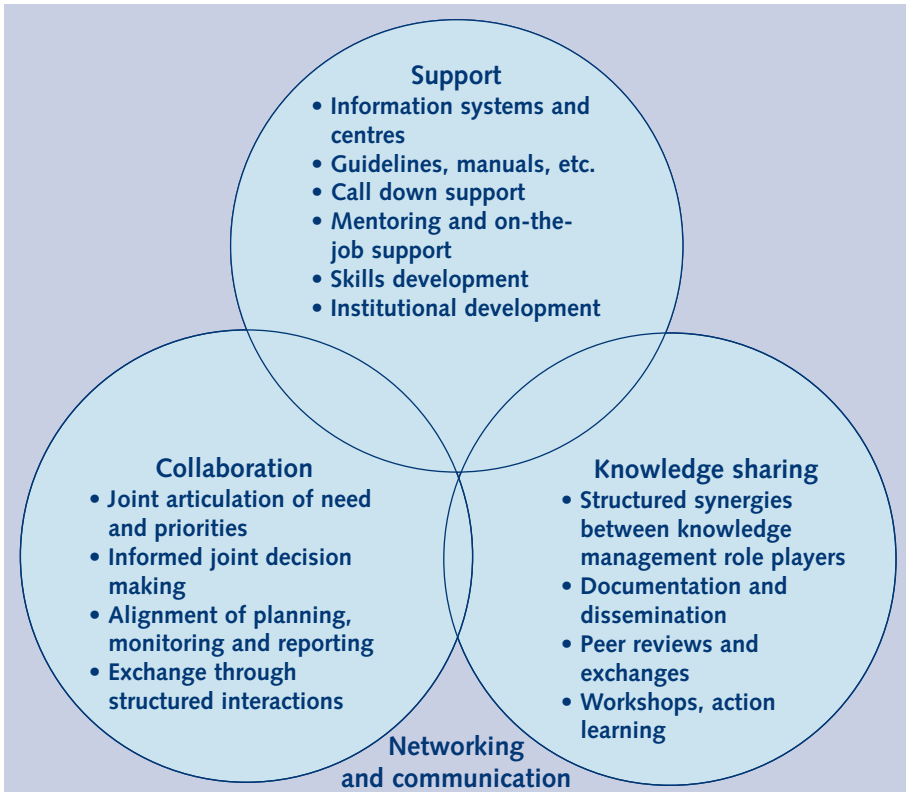

Support
- **Information systems and centres**
- **Guidelines, manuals, etc.**
- **Call down support**
- **Mentoring and on-the-job support**
- **Skills development**
- **Institutional development**

Collaboration
- **Joint articulation of need and priorities**
- **Informed joint decision making**
- **Alignment of planning, monitoring and reporting**
- **Exchange through structured interactions**

Knowledge sharing
- **Structured synergies between knowledge management role players**
- **Documentation and dissemination**
- **Peer reviews and exchanges**
- **Workshops, action learning**

Networking and communication

Figure 6.3. Three interrelated elements of a learning sector

Knowledge management is about people

The Framework highlights three distinct levels at which knowledge management can be practised:
- At the personal level
- Organisational knowledge management at a wider interpersonal level
- Networking between organisations.

The WIN-SA slogan, "making knowledge work for us", sees personal knowledge management as the foundation stone for enabling a learning culture. If each person takes responsibility for what s/he knows, does not know, or needs to know more about, then organisational and networking knowledge management initiatives are likely to be easier to implement. Organisational knowledge management efforts needs to be directed at establishing a culture of openness and knowledge sharing, as well as

encouraging face-to-face and interpersonal communications. For networking between organisations to succeed, solid communication and regular exposure or visits between partners are necessary. Engaging on all three fronts to ensure a learning culture is a challenge, and one that has to be approached simultaneously and not sequentially (Pels and Odhiambo, 2005).

WIN-SA promotes an overarching network

WIN-SA aims to create a learning alliance rather than to establish a single centre of learning and expertise. Its focus is on enabling networks to thrive and cross-pollinate within a coherent knowledge-sharing framework. Accordingly, it recognises existing networks and respects the roles and responsibilities of its members.

DWAF is the custodian and manager of the National Information System for water services. It collates and maintains planning and programme data, as well as monitoring and evaluation systems, and reports on the state of the sector. It has embarked upon establishing Regional Information Centres and One-Stop-Shops, in its nine regional offices. WIN-SA's role is complementary, focusing on knowledge management and sharing, and ensuring accessibility. WIN-SA, is ensuring that lessons are documented and disseminated in a far more targeted, 'need to know', approach. WIN-SA's ability to work closely with these networks and other collaborative structures as an independent facilitator is recognised and welcomed; its emphasis is on being mutually supportive rather than territorial and competitive.
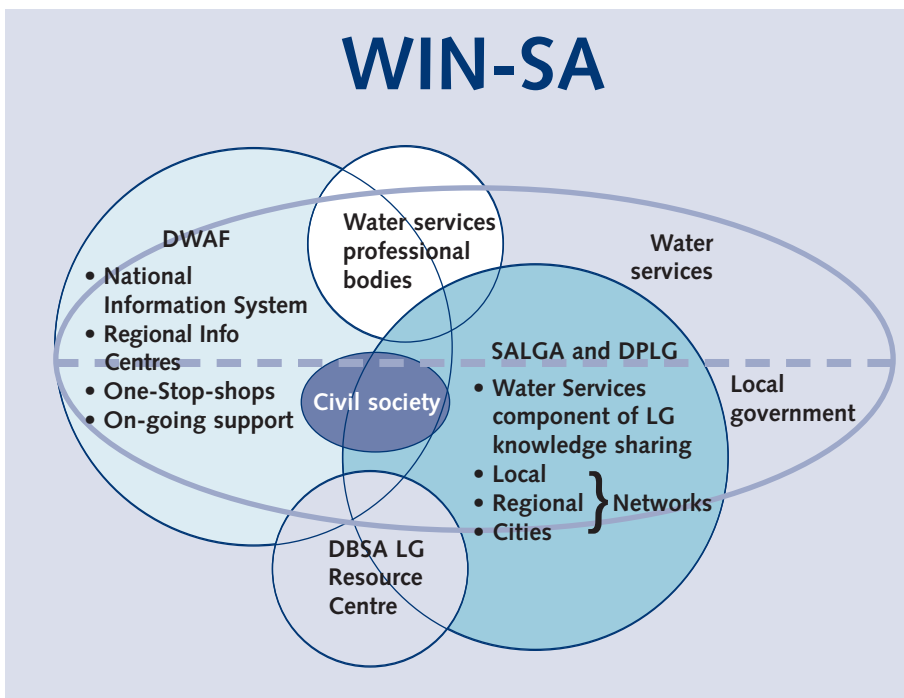

Figure 6.4. WIN-SA: promoting links and interfaces between sector initiatives

Links and interfaces will also be established internationally in order for the sector in South Africa to access international knowledge, lessons and best practice. IRC participation in and support of for WIN-SA provides access to sharing opportunities at global level.

Lessons learnt

Some of the more important lessons emerging from the 'learning sector' approach are as follows:

• Political and sector mandates are a prerequisite for wide-scale collaboration and lesson learning. This can be politically sensitive, requiring an understanding of differing interests and priorities across a number of national, provincial and local role players. It is not always easy to obtain mandates, and it takes time and energy. However, the experience in South Africa demonstrates that it has possibly been the most important enabling factor.

• A vision and will for collaboration must be built. This can be time consuming, but cannot be bypassed. It is inextricably linked to obtaining high level mandates, and is part of the process of ensuring the vision is shared at all levels and in all structures.

• Opportunities for learning and growth are greatly enhanced with leadership from national government (in this case DWAF); leadership that is accountable and transparent, enables a sector approach, and prioritises the need to build the capacity of other partners.

• An alliance or network should not seek to take over leadership from those who have this mandate – its role should be to add its own value, by responding, facilitating, coordinating and supporting.

• The focus must be on strengthening the capacity of sector partners, and not on building separate (or new) organisational structures. The success of a network or alliance is dependent on the contributions of its participating members. Roles have to be commonly defined and agreed, as there can be tension or unhealthy competition – most often in the early stages.

• It is vital to understand and respond to real needs and interests, recognising that there are usually differing, possibly conflicting, interests. Understanding of needs is built through consistent engagement.

• Effective and wide-scale lesson learning cannot happen in a vacuum. It should be part of a holistic sector approach – this can be built over time.

• Sector collaboration greatly enhances the potential for knowledge sharing and learning. It provides the platform where stakeholders can engage and learning takes place. It is essential to build on existing structures and work, and not 'reinvent the wheel'.

- It is important to identify particular services that will build capacity for a learning culture – through facilitating, supporting, training and mentoring – and to fill gaps. Where services focus on trends and topical issues to support municipalities to deliver better services, lessons have been more eagerly taken up. Services must be 'forward looking' and in line with legislation.

- Having dedicated capacity to facilitate and drive collaboration or a network or an alliance is essential to ensure a focus and speedier progress and to build credibility.

- There is a need to establish accountable governance structures and to foster a sense of ownership in participating stakeholders and role players. Members (or partners) must be part of the emerging process and part of all decision-making.

- Initial 'quick wins' are important. By launching a web site, developing a promotional flyer and taking the lead in managing the Sector Collaboration Review, WIN-SA raised its profile at a time when it was necessary to be seen to deliver.

- The Sector Collaboration Review highlighted the importance of the independent facilitator / honest broker role in setting up and supporting collaboration through Masibambane.
- Messages, information and support to and between provincial and local government structures need to be consistent.

- Sustainability and financial viability are inextricably linked, and are all-important. WIN-SA is exploring its ability to become financially sustainable – but needs to test whether clients are willing to contribute in appropriate ways.

Way forward for developing a learning sector

The above lessons give clear direction on how to move forward, especially in terms of approach and methodology. Mainstreaming a learning agenda through current collaboration initiatives and structures will ensure that it is responsive to needs and remains relevant – as an integral part of a sector programme.

WIN-SA's slogan – "making knowledge work for us" –means focusing on practical and useful activities that have tangible results, whilst promoting and strengthening capacity within the sector to ensure that learning takes place as part of daily work.

Since most lessons are about implementation, a municipal focus has been prioritised through the Masibambane provincial forums and municipal networks. Those who implement projects and run services are supported to identify lessons for documentation and dissemination. As part of this process, the Bringing in the Harvest Campaign (Pretorius, 2005) is focusing on issues already highlighted as municipal information and knowledge requirements. Highly specific response forms have been widely circulated and gathered through mailings, insertions in sector publications, and at sector meetings. Some of the lessons captured have already been used as the first Lesson Series and Field Notes.
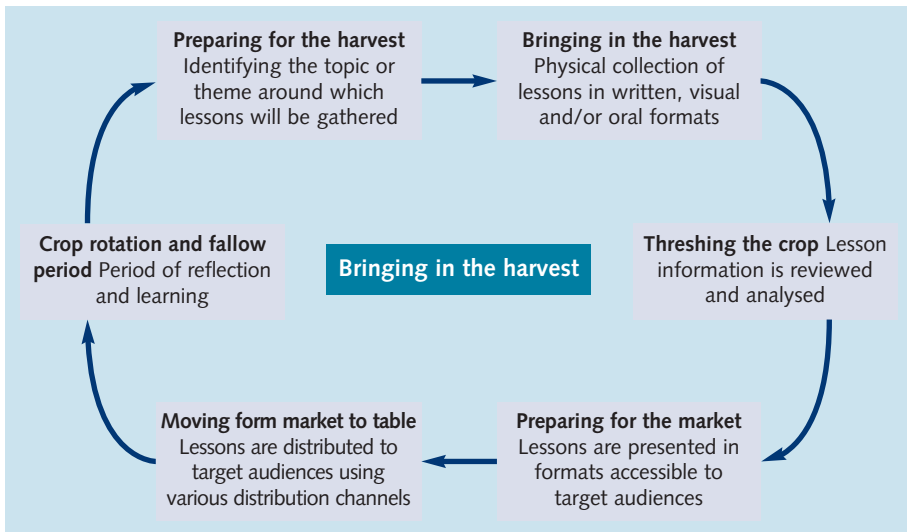
Figure 6.5. Bringing in the Harvest Campaign

Through "learning journeys" (Figure 6.6), exchange visits and working with potential documenters in provincial forums and municipalities, WIN-SA seeks to support sector role players. This process began by supporting and strengthening reviews and lesson learning in sanitation and the institutional reform process relating to mechanisms for municipal service delivery. WIN-SA has also designed learning exchanges between the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces, and worked alongside the District Water Services Managers Forum, for which WIN-SA is providing the secretariat.

A critical element for facilitating or enabling appropriate learning is the importance of strategic analysis of content through reviews, debates, reporting and monitoring. Leadership, in particular, should provide strategic analysis, which will be inculcated over time.

WIN-SA is rapidly growing its understanding of how learning takes place and which approaches and methodologies best suit different circumstances, including formal training, workshops and meetings, videos, mentoring and coaching, one-to-one support, accessing information electronically, guidelines, hints and tips, forums of reflection and exchange visits. The focus will be on building capacity within targeted members and organisations, rather than on building external support capacity, which would create long term reliance.
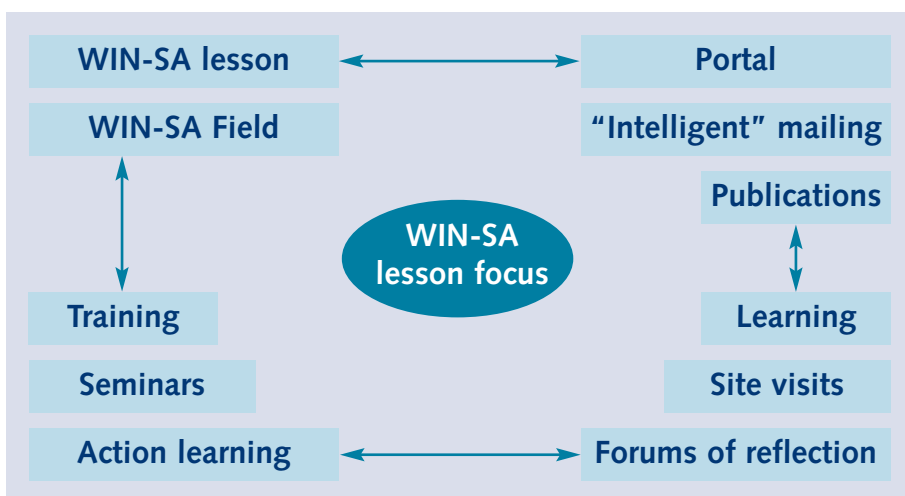
Figure 6.6. A selection of products and services as part of the 'learning journey'

An immediate priority is to finalise the Sector Learning Framework through Masibambane provincial structures and municipal networks, to ensure that the sector shares a vision for structured lesson learning. As part of institutionalising the concept, this will be promoted and shared at the same time that WIN-SA disseminates and discusses the findings of the Sector Collaboration Review with the six provinces new to Masibambane.

WIN-SA recognises that learning is also an individual experience. In this multi-cultural and multi-linguistic society, attention is being given to these differences and individual preferences and requirements. For example, the "intelligent mailing list", linked to the sector database, contains information on individual preferences for content information, and in which format municipalities would like to obtain it. Furthermore as knowledge sharing reaches a wider spectrum of people, and in particular the consumer, recognition will have to be given to different languages, literacy levels and preferred ways of communicating and learning.

Concluding comments

The key elements of a learning alliance emerged, rather than being consciously set up, as a consequence of having the objective of maximising lesson learning at all levels and with all partners in the sector. This was ambitious and has been time consuming, but is now demonstrating clear gains.

South Africa's experience highlights that a sector approach, through which sector partners collaborate, is useful, if not essential, for a learning alliance to flourish. A learning culture (or alliance) would probably not have taken root if sector participants had not recognised for themselves the value of exchanging information and sharing lessons, to be better equipped to do their work. Without this recognition, it is highly

unlikely that sector members would have prioritised knowledge sharing. It would have been sidelined as the preserve of 'knowledge experts'.

The fact that South Africa embarked upon a conscious and mandated SWAP was fortuitous. It does, however, pose the question about whether a learning alliance can be established as something separate from sector structures. It would seem that being able to mainstream learning within broader sector processes, thereby responding to the realities and needs of the time, and using sector structures as platforms for exchange and learning not only ensured its relevance, but also its sustainability.

Whatever the approach taken in other countries, the South African experience illustrates that process and the development of relationships and partnerships are paramount for any meaningful learning. Clarifying roles and responsibilities is also crucial.

The South African water services sector recognises that, despite the opportune start enabled by Masibambane, "the sector working together", there is still much to be done and improved on to ensure that a learning agenda is institutionalised. However, given the strong leadership of DWAF, and the mandate for both Masibambane and WIN-SA, the sector is well on its way!

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PART III: Reflections

Don Checho is the operator of the community-managed wastewater treatment plant at La Voragine, Colombia. He explains the functioning of the plant to visitors from other communities and institutions. Peer exchange is an important method of learning.
Picture: Stef Smits

7. Building learning alliances – some initial findings

Stef Smits, Mariela García, Patrick Moriarty and Peter Laban

Summary

Innovation and scaling up are not straightforward processes, which happen automatically if people from different levels, different institutions, different disciplines and even different cultures are brought together in a learning platform. There may be risks related to learning processes, including resistance to change, partnership risks, conflicts and lack of focus and effectiveness. Establishing a learning alliance requires building on the diversity of stakeholder perspectives whilst dealing with these risks. This can be done by using a number of steps to initiate a learning alliance, employing a number of generic methodologies and process facilitation. Process facilitation can be understood to consist of the weaving together of a number of these generic methods, and implies mediation between different stakeholders. Process facilitation needs to be institutionalised within a learning alliance, and requires dedicated time and resources. Knowledge institutes or resource centres are often well-placed to take up this institutionalised role.

Introduction

By definition, a learning alliance aims to follow a social learning approach at various levels, with multiple stakeholders, multiple disciplines and in many cases multiple cultures. Only in such a way, can different stakeholder perspectives be brought together, and can barriers to horizontal and vertical learning be overcome. Bringing these different perspectives together so that they result in scaling up and innovation requires a clear methodological approach. Just as with any other multi-stakeholder platform, LAs have a number of potential risks:

- **Resistance to change:** the process of learning brings an inherent need to create change in the way stakeholders think about and act on an issue. Stakeholders may need to unlearn practices to which they were used, as illustrated by a number of examples given in the case of EMPOWERS. Often these changes do not happen easily, or without resistance, as people may feel threatened by loss of prestige, being seen to look weak or ignorant, or even sometimes by losing their livelihoods.
- **Partnership risks:** learning alliances are beset with all kinds of partnership risks common to any multi-stakeholder processes (McIntyre, 2005). Powerful stakeholders may dominate the debate, while less empowered stakeholder voices may not be heard. In other cases, powerful stakeholders may not even want to participate, or may drop out along the way, as they stand only to lose, for example in processes around pollution control.
- **Conflicts:** as a learning alliance explicitly aims to bring together stakeholders from different backgrounds, who by definition are not like-minded, conflicts of interest may ultimately emerge. This is not necessarily a bad thing in itself; it is often needed to bring about change. The main issue is how conflicting interests are managed.
- **Lack of effectiveness and focus:** this was identified by participants in the IRC/UNESCO-IHE International Symposium on Learning Alliances in 2005 as a potential risk. If there is no commonly agreed objective or focus, there is a risk that a platform will lose

members. As Proost and Leeuwis (Chapter 2) point out, learning alliances are about helping groups of people to identify common problems and constraints or areas of opportunity, and then finding ways to deal with them. If there is no clear methodology, the objectives may not be achieved and may not yield expected results.

When building a learning alliance, these partnership risks need to be dealt with in an adequate way, recognising the diversity of interests, perspectives and learning modes of LA members. This requires a careful balancing act and continuous monitoring of the process. Cases elaborated in previous chapters show a diversity of steps and methodologies that have been taken to achieve this balance. They show that there is no standard recipe for building learning alliances. However, despite differences, there are also commonalities between the cases reported here and elsewhere. They show a number of common elements, which can be categorised as follows:

1. Key steps in the establishment of a learning alliance: activities to initiate the process
2. Methodological building blocks: the set of methodologies and activities to be carried out by LA members to structure the learning process
3. Process facilitation: the actions needed to weave the different activities together and to maintain and ensure the smooth flow of communication and coordination between stakeholders.

Taken together these elements form a framework for building learning alliances. These elements need to be brought together in each context to build a unique process of learning and change. This is in line with Leeuwis *et al.* (2002), who call for an approach to social learning that is based upon the weaving together of different strategies and activities in a flexible and contextual manner.

This chapter elaborates each of these elements, specifying what they entail, illustrated by examples from case studies that show how they have been carried out and, in some cases, with what effect. The sections on key steps and methodological building blocks draw heavily upon the original background paper to the Symposium (Moriarty *et al.*, 2005), supported by case experiences from the previous chapters. The section on process facilitation brings together two perspectives: one on the facilitator as a person with a set of skills and attitude, as presented by García (2005), and an organisational perspective on facilitation, as elaborated for example by Laban *et al.* (2005 a). These perspectives are presented along with experiences described in previous chapters.

Steps in starting up learning processes

A number of steps can be identified in starting up learning processes, including the initiation of the learning process, a stakeholder analysis, problem or opportunity identification, stakeholder mobilisation and a number of planning activities. Although these are presented as discrete steps, in reality they are not always clear cut, and there may be several iterations; activities such as stakeholder analysis often continue throughout a learning process.

Initiation

Learning processes may be initiated in different ways and by different entities. A key question is who is the initiator, the person or organisation that triggers the establishment of a learning and change process? Eventually, it is hoped that learning alliance members drive their own learning processes, but in many cases the process is initiated by one, or just a few, person/people or organisation(s). Often the initiators are 'projects' or knowledge institutes, mandated to trigger change, as was the case with TRANSCOL, EMPOWERS or in the Post-Harvest Innovation Learning Alliance (PHILA) in Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Morris *et al.*, 2005). In each case, the initiator was to a greater or lesser extent an 'outsider'. In other cases, the initiator is an insider, from within the group of problem owners. Restrepo *et al.* (2005) report how tanneries in a town in Colombia started a learning alliance process in order to address pollution problems that they were themselves causing. Successful farmers' networks in Thailand realised that in order to address land and water productivity issues, they needed to expand their learning process to include government support agencies (Ruaysoongnern and Penning de Vries, 2005). Yet, when the initiation comes from within, often there is less interest in scaling up the approach; the main focus is on the local impact of change, which of course is a valid approach. However, the experience of the tanneries in Colombia generated so much interest in the tannery association that similar learning platforms started elsewhere. South Africa (Chapter 6) provides a good example where it is impossible to identify a clear initiator or even moment of initiation, but where the learning approach emerged out of various sector reforms and collaboration efforts.

Stakeholder analysis and problem identification

There is often debate about whether a learning process starts by first identifying stakeholders or by defining a problem. Do stakeholders come together and then define a problem? Or, is a problem formulated first, and then stakeholders identified related to the problem? This is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. Usually, a broad topic or problem is identified (often by the initiator), after which stakeholders are identified and mobilised, and they identify the problem further. This is typically a reiterative phase in a learning process. A good example of this approach is given in Chapter 3, where Lundy and Gottret explain how a learning process started with an umbrella thematic area of (in this case) rural enterprise development. Learning alliance members then identified sub-topics, with different sub-groups of stakeholders. Proost and Leeuwis (Chapter 2) warn against starting with the problem. They suggest that in many cases, a platform can be established around an opportunity rather than a problem.

An important aspect is not so much the specific problem or opportunity selected as a trigger for learning, but rather the way that the central facilitating agencies decide to advance. Under a traditional technology transfer paradigm, knowledge institutes identify the issue, develop technological solutions and provide them to end users via training and dissemination. This approach contrasts strongly with a learning alliance which seeks to involve all actors to varying degrees in framing the learning issue, by defining the problem or opportunity, in the subsequent development of innovations or technologies – understood in the broad sense described in Chapter 2 – and in an on-

going process of adaptation and learning around implementation. The philosophical differences between the two approaches are crucial. A good example is seen in the Multiple Use Services (MUS) project (Chapter 1), where the LA members themselves not only define the issue, but even the pilot and case study sites.

In the MUS learning alliance in Colombia, learning alliance members themselves selected case study sites. The picture shows members of the learning alliance in a meeting with representatives of the Municipality of Restrepo and community-based organisations at one of the sites.
Picture: Stef Smits

The stakeholder analysis aims to identify stakeholders who are crucial to innovation or its scaling up or, (just as important) those who are currently limiting these processes and should therefore be mobilised as part of the learning alliance. This exercise needs to be done at the relevant levels in each particular case. When initiated from outside, a structured stakeholder analysis may be done (see for example Moriarty *et al.*, 2006; Guzha, 2005), often using specifically designed tools, such as from the Rapid Rural Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS) toolbox (Engel and Salomon, 2002). The advantage of such tools is that they allow for systematic analysis of whether different capacities and mandates required for innovation and scaling up (such as research, implementation, policy and dissemination) at different levels are covered by existing stakeholders. In other cases, such as the Thailand farmers' networks mentioned above, the stakeholder analysis is not done in such a structured or explicit way, but emerges from a problem analysis based upon identified limitations in the farmers' own scope of work. One key stakeholder that can hardly ever be left

out is government. Despite apparent difficulties of working with government agencies in some countries, these agencies are often the only ones in a position to scale up innovations and support their sustainability and are therefore critical (McIntyre, 2005).

Stakeholder mobilisation

Eventually, stakeholders will be mobilised to form platforms at different levels. These may start with a core group of initiating organisations, which gradually grows, as shown in the EMPOWERS case. In other cases, a platform can be built upon existing networks, as for example in the case of the MUS project in Zimbabwe (Guzha, 2005). The establishment and further development of the platform is often a gradual process, in which stakeholders join or leave as the problem identification becomes more focused. There is no problem with stakeholders joining in later or dropping out earlier, so long as roles and expectations are clear. Stakeholders typically only come together of their own volition, when they are directly interested in a problem or opportunity at stake. It may therefore be necessary to identify other stakeholders who have potential to either block or help in the wider up-take of solutions. This may mean that clusters of stakeholders are first formed around sub-issues, before everyone comes together on one platform. This is, for example, what happened in the Wastewater Agriculture and Sanitation for Poverty Alleviation (WASPA) project in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Clemett, 2006).

Development issues tend to be messy and multifaceted. For this reason, it is often useful to link diverse clusters of stakeholders who have energy and interest to work on specific sub-topics of a larger problem. The learning alliance framework allows for this without forcing all stakeholders to work on all topics. Harvesting the lessons and assessing overall impact at meso or intermediate level is critical to ground the process and to maintain a clear focus on what has been achieved and remains to be done.

Defining shared objectives, vision, mission, core values and responsibilities

Defining the objectives, vision, mission and core values of the alliance often overlaps with the mobilisation of stakeholders. Multiple stakeholders have different, often divergent interests, yet share a common interest around a particular topic. To stimulate their focus and action, a clear objective, or even a vision and mission of the alliance is needed. As Lundy and Gottret (Chapter 3) state, this may require negotiation on the basis of the organisations' practices, needs and interests.

In addition, it may be useful to define some shared core values on how the joint learning process should take place. Multiple stakeholders bring with them their own ways of working. In many cases, there may be a lack of mutual confidence or even conflicts between participating stakeholders. Unresolved, these can block effective ways of learning together. Defining core values may help to overcome some of these barriers. Each alliance needs to define its own values, but relevant ones may include: transparency, mutual trust, inclusiveness and equity. As described below, facilitators play a key role in establishing and promoting such core values, as well as monitoring that these are adhered to. Ultimately, however, it is the members who define these values and take a decision to stick to them.

Finally, clear agreements need to be made on activities, responsibilities, resources and the contributions of partners to the process etc., to set the rules of the game.

Methodological building blocks

Leeuwis *et al.* (2002) warn against methodological blueprints for social learning processes. Such processes can only to some extent be designed, as they need to leave space for creativity, learning and negotiation. As the process evolves and the context changes, the methodology needs to be adapted. A number of methodologies are used in most cases: 1) action research, 2) process monitoring and documentation and 3) dissemination and communication. Together these can be used to structure the learning process. Although most of the learning takes place by doing, there may be need for specific training or other learning events. These may be linked to any of the methods outlined below.

Action research

Action research is the process of solving problems within a structured environment that allows for the drawing of solid and trustworthy lessons and conclusions. It is perhaps the single most crucial methodology used in the learning alliance process, as illustrated by examples in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The precise way in which action research is carried out differs from case to case, and various authors, for example Bolt *et al.*, (1998), have developed resource guides on tools to be used in action research in the WASH sector.

There are various definitions of action research (for example O'Brien, 1998). Most refer to a process of solving real-life problems in collaboration between researchers and practitioners, in addition being able to draw more generic and widely applicable lessons. In a learning alliance, this is the process through which locally relevant innovations are developed and generic lessons relevant for scaling up are learnt, and where the capacity is built for problem owners to replicate innovation elsewhere.

Action research is a useful component and probably essential to the activities carried out by any learning alliance. It has a number of key characteristics:

- **Action research provides a structure for learning and planning**. A key starting point is that knowledge (knowing how to do things) is not something that can be simply transferred from one group or individual to another, but must rather be created anew in each new context through a process of learning (see Chapter 3). In complex situations, there is a need 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. Action research lends itself to all of these activities (Figure 7.1). A cyclical approach to lesson learning and knowledge creation is fundamental to developing and adapting innovations in a flexible and context-specific way. Such cycles are therefore followed in learning alliances as well, witnessed for example in the double-loop learning cycle in the LAs in which CIAT is involved (Chapter 3). It often proves useful to bring these cycles of learning into line with the project or planning cycles through which sector organisations may work anyway, or to use action research to strengthen such cycles, as in the case of

EMPOWERS (Chapter 5). In the context of a learning alliance, in contrast to conventional research, the key issue is to move relatively rapidly through these cycles, as action often cannot wait a long time for research outputs and dissemination. The concept of short cycle dissemination is therefore considered useful. The flip side of the need for speed is that research capacity may be strained.
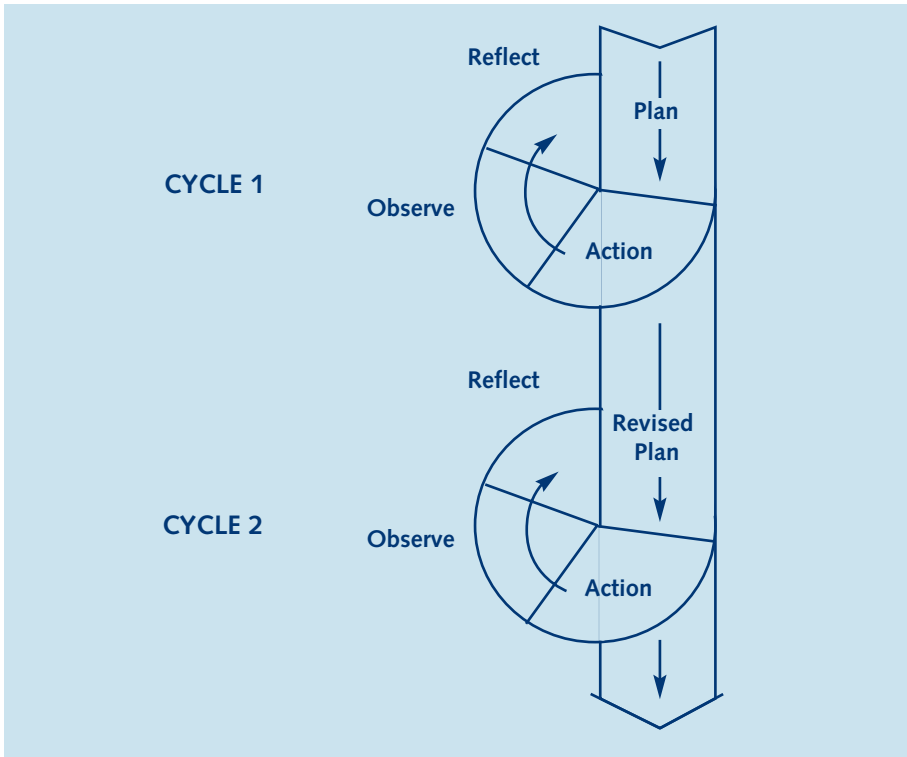

Reflect

Plan

CYCLE 1

Observe

Action

Reflect

Revised Plan

CYCLE 2

Observe

Action

Figure 7.1. Simple Action Research Model (MacIsaac, 1995, cited in O'Brien, 1998)

• **Action research helps to define a context-specific learning agenda.** The problem 'owners', in this case the learning alliance members, define the object of action research, either as a problem, or as Proost and Leeuwis suggest, as an opportunity. This develops a more relevant context-specific research agenda as the first phase of the double-loop learning cycle, described in Chapter 3. In order to make the learning agenda context-specific, Du Toit (2005) calls for an approach of reflexive learning in context, i.e. facilitating individual learning paths, structured around reflection upon one's own actions and context (Figure 7.2). He gives an example from a capacity development programme for a wide range of stakeholders around Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) in South Africa. Individuals have been clustered into a number of Communities of Practice. Each CoP develops its own curriculum based on reflection about its own practices. The learning process is open-ended, as it responds to changing policies and practices. It consists both of facilitated meetings, where concepts are introduced and reflection takes place, as well as 'work-away'

sessions, when individuals apply lessons in their own practice. From a research perspective, it is important to characterise the diverse contexts – geographical, social, political, organisational, etc. – in which the learning agenda will be implemented, in order to make sense of eventual outcomes and results and extract key principals for future learning processes.
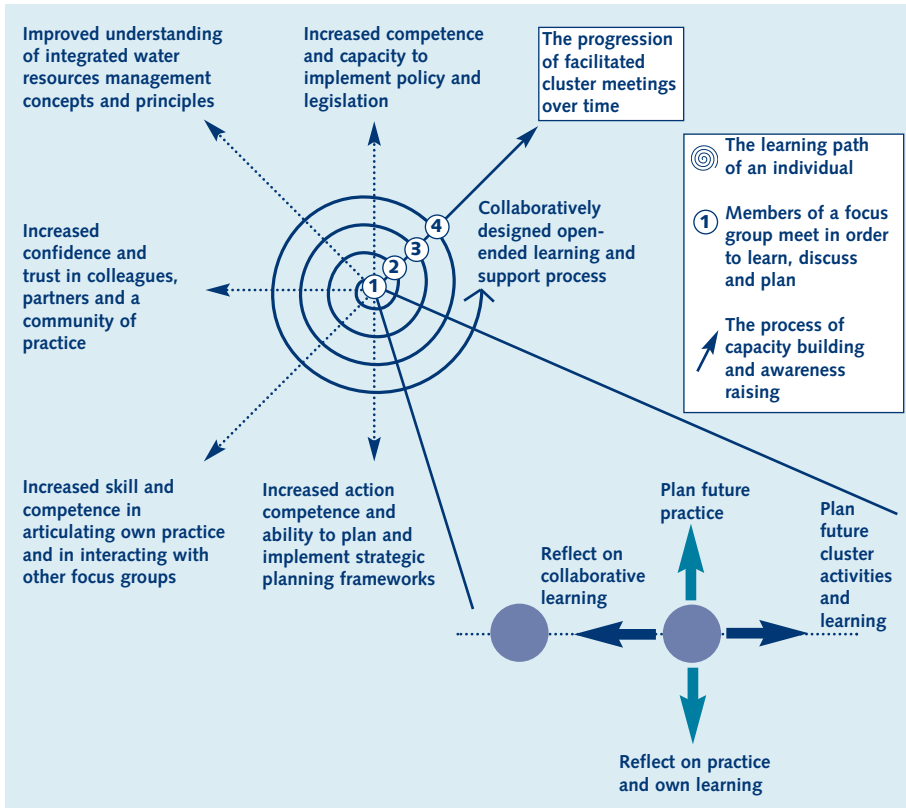

Figure 7.2. Spiral model for reflexive learning in context (Du Toit, 2005)

• **Action research links local innovations to drawing generic lessons:** Action research projects provide the opportunity to make tacit knowledge explicit (Adolph, 2005): turning knowledge into information which can in turn catalyse and guide the creation of new knowledge. Tacit knowledge consists of the skills, experiences and assumptions that people have, apparent through their actions and their ability to know how to do things. Involving stakeholders in an action helps build on and benefit from their tacit knowledge, while involving researchers and documenters helps in making this tacit knowledge explicit. These should eventually not only lead to improved innovations, but also to generic lessons for improving an innovation. In the TRANSCOL project, people's water needs were addressed through developing and adapting water treatment technologies, which in turn contributed to further insights into the technology as such (Visscher, 2006). As mentioned in Chapter 1, it may be useful to develop principles of innovation out of local practice, to enable scaling up. The MUS project (Koppen *et al*., 2006) is a good example.

- **Strengthening capacity for adaptive management:** Action research implies that all stakeholders are involved in analysing problems, planning actions and reflection. This helps to develop skills and capacities, especially connections and networks and the social capital needed to tackle similar problems. Chapter 4 presents a mixed picture of how TRANSCOL has been able to strengthen this kind of capacity at institutional level. This is elaborated in Chapter 8.
- **Enhancing sustainability:** Extensive debates about participatory approaches have shown the importance of involving communities in the analysis of problems and the design of solutions. This creates ownership of the problem and the solution, improving the chances of sustainability. This not only applies to communities, but also to officials and NGO staff, government agencies and the private sector. Involving all stakeholders in the action research process is one way of contributing to sustainability.

Process monitoring and documentation

Learning alliances aim to bring about change in development practice among stakeholders. However, not all stakeholders are open to change, and some resist it. Therefore, it is important to understand whether change is taking place and what enables or hinders it. Process monitoring and documentation contributes to a learning alliance process by capturing and analysing in a systematic way what happened in a change process, how it happened, and why it happened, pointing to corrective action, if possible, organising and disseminating findings for future experiences (Schouten, 2007 forthcoming).

- **Monitoring impact:** The expected outcomes or impacts of a learning alliance are often intangible, such as changes in attitude, behaviour and practice of key stakeholders in order to sustain or scale up innovations. Process monitoring is in the first place a tool to monitor and evaluate such impacts. This requires that the change processes to be tracked are defined. Abd-Alhadi *et al*. (2006) and Schouten (2007 forthcoming) provide definitions of change process in the EMPOWERS project. Chapter 3 identifies outcome mapping (IDRC, 2004) as a useful tool for monitoring these kinds of outcomes.
- **Analysis of what hinders or enables change:** If scaling up is to take place, learning alliance members need to understand what enables or hinders the change process. Understanding these factors may help them to take corrective action or to capitalise on positive changes for scaling up, not only for the innovation at stake, but also for other innovation processes. This is one of the focus areas for EMPOWERS.
- **Enhanced learning within the learning alliance:** Collective monitoring can trigger social learning, as it stimulates reflection (Guijt and Proost, 2002). The focus is to stimulate reflection within the LA on its own progress towards the objectives of the members and the collective.

Process monitoring and documentation is a relatively new methodology, and few consolidated experiences provide details of how to monitor process. A good resource document on methods for qualitative monitoring is the manual on outcome mapping, developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, 2004). This

provides a complete overview of building learning and reflection into development programmes. Simple tools can be derived from this and other frameworks. Schouten (2007 forthcoming) provides both generic guidance on how to organise process documentation and an analysis of the practical experiences in EMPOWERS.
In addition to process monitoring, there is need for conventional monitoring of outputs and impacts on the ground, to assess the local innovations and their results. This may also help to gain insights into the efficacy of learning alliances as compared to other approaches.

Dissemination and communication

Within a learning alliance, dissemination and communication aim at supporting processes of innovation and scaling up. The target audience is in the first place members of the LA themselves. It is important also to disseminate results to those outside the process. Moriarty *et al.* (2005) outlines some key points related to this:

- **Short cycle dissemination:** Dissemination needs to be adapted to the action research cycle. This means that results need to be fed back more often into the learning alliance than is conventionally done in scientific research. Results or findings can be made available quickly, even if they are temporary and subject to adaptation, revision and improvement by partners.
- **Locally relevant media:** The way in which the findings are fed back into the learning alliance must fit the way (including language) that LA members use information. This may be through written text, at meetings, or by using radio, video, or, as in the case of WIN-SA, a website.
- **Advocacy:** As not all the relevant stakeholders are likely to be member of the learning alliance, there is a need for advocacy to make sure that the LA remains in contact with the outside world. This includes giving on-going feedback to key decision-makers in partner agencies who may or may not be directly involved in the learning alliance.
- **Dedicated time and resources:** Dissemination takes time and resources and may require professional support.

Process facilitation

The various activities and strategies of a learning alliance need to be woven together in a coherent and robust way, in response to the changing context and the needs and interests of the members. This is not an easy task, and requires careful facilitation. Facilitation is also needed to overcome problems, such as resistance to change, conflicts and partnership risks. Process facilitation therefore consist of two elements: 1) guiding different strategies and activities into a flexible and contextual learning process and, 2) mediating communication, coordination and decision-making processes between stakeholders within and between levels (based on Leeuwis *et al.*, 2002 and Laban *et al.*, 2005a).

This section takes a detailed look into various aspects of process facilitation, identifying and examining the key functions and activities required of a process facilitator. This is followed by an examination of which organisations or individuals are best suited to

taking on the role(s) of process facilitator. Finally, we look at some programmatic aspects of process facilitation, including costs.

Functions in process facilitation

The 2005 Symposium generated lots of debate on the role of the facilitator. Attention turned initially to who should take up the role(s). However, it was considered more relevant to define the key functions and activities involved in process facilitation (McIntyre, 2005). Detailed descriptions of these functions depend of course on context. The experiences reported in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, as well as in Laban *et al.*, (2005a), point to a number of critical facilitation functions:

- **Initiation of an LA process** and establishment of a platform. In this context, the facilitator may be the initiator, who takes the first steps to bring stakeholders together to address a certain issue. Initiation consists of the various tasks described above under "Steps in starting up learning processes". This also pointed out that initiation is often by an external agent, such as an NGO or project, with an explicit agenda for change, although insiders may also take up the task.
- **Methodological overview and guidance** over the process. This is, again, what Leeuwis *et al.* (2002) call weaving together activities and strategies into a flexible and contextual learning process. It consists of 1) making sure that learning methods appeal to participants and address issues closest to the needs of LA members, 2) continuous monitoring of learning progress and, if needed, adapting approaches to improve it, 3) ensuring that the overall focus is maintained. This requires the facilitator to have a thorough knowledge of and experience with interactive learning methodologies.
- **Ensuring participation** of all relevant stakeholders and **empowerment** of the marginalised. Learning alliances are complex spaces with a multiplicity of interests at play, resulting in a process of negotiation, rather than a dialogue between equals. Powerful stakeholders may dominate the process, and the voices of the most vulnerable groups may not be heard. Process facilitation is needed to ensure that all relevant stakeholders participate in a meaningful way. It is outside the scope of this book to go into detailed theoretical reflections and methodologies for empowerment. It suffices to look at how to create conditions, in a practical way, to empower marginalised groups and to generate strategies that favour a peer relationship. This has been a key focus in the EMPOWERS project, operating in a relatively top-down management environment (Laban *et al.*, 2005b). Empowerment of communities and of institutional representatives was also an important component facilitated by the project team in TRANSCOL.
- **Conflict management:** In any learning process there will be conflicts and divergent interests. Through process facilitation, these can be brought together to move towards joint solutions, or at least the different interests can be clearly expressed and explained. This is closely related to participation and empowerment.
- **Process documentation and sharing:** In an ideal world process documentation and sharing would be a decentralised process involving many stakeholders. In reality, there is a strong need for this role to be assumed, or clearly delegated, by the process facilitator. Rapid processes of documentation, analysis and sharing are integral to the dynamics of a learning alliance and should be there from the beginning.

Skills and attitude of process facilitators

The mix of skills available is a crucial factor in the facilitation process. In Chapter 2, Proost and Leeuwis distinguished four types of facilitators: *technical*, focusing on technical skills and competences, *intentional*, with specific interventions based on theory and justifications, *person-centred*, with emphasis on personal qualities and attitudes, and *critical*, with emphasis on the political nature of facilitation and its effects on the participants. Their conclusion is that in the literature, the technical type of facilitator predominates. This risks concentrating only on knowledge and skills, so that the emotional side of learning, related to attitudes, beliefs and values, remains underdeveloped.

Given these various functions, process facilitators need a broad focus, a wide range of skills and a particular attitude. The concept of facilitator has arisen to promote a different way of working from the traditional extension worker who diffuses technology. The facilitator is a person who listens, learns and understands, and, as Chambers (1993) puts it, is a person who puts 'the last' (i.e. the poor and weak) at the centre of their work, so that these groups set their own priorities and become the agents of their own development. Rogers' (1983) work on learning helped to create further understanding about the fundamental characteristics of the facilitator. On the basis of this theory, as well as on experiences of EMPOWERS and TRANSCOL, Laban *et al.* (2005a) and García (2005) identified a number of key skills and attitudes. A facilitator:
• Creates trust and respect
• Acts as a bridge between people, developing shared values
• Has a vision of possible outcomes
• Is capable of metacommunication (i.e. communication both about content and the process) and documenting and analysing the process

In his or her way of working, a facilitator is:
• Committed
• Flexible
• Responsive
• Inclusive and balancing, especially in ensuring that voices that are often left out are heard
• Encouraging and motivating
• Neutral
• Problem-solving
• Self-controlling
• Culturally sensitive and contextual knowledgeable
• Self-aware and comfortable with their role
• A good listener and
• Someone who use simple, understandable language

However, as García states, when making a list of this sort, "it is difficult to not fall into the trap of creating a vision of a semi-magician who solves all problems or an angel blessed with all the virtues in the world". Most facilitators only have some of these traits. In addition, as we have seen, facilitators are the people who initiate a learning

process. This may be in tension with their perceived neutrality. By working in teams, however, it is possible to bring in a wider range of attributes, and ensure collective neutrality.

The facilitator needs to provide space for creativity in workshops, meetings, field visits and discussions
Picture: CINARA

The facilitation team

Having defined functions, skills and attitudes, we return to the question of who should carry out the work of a facilitator. The entire set of functions and skills may be very difficult to find within one organisation, l*et al*one one person. As a result, most of the cases presented are facilitated by a small team from various organisations, ranging from IRC and CINARA in the case of TRANSCOL to 12 different organisations in three countries for EMPOWERS.

It is often said that the facilitator (or facilitating organisation) should be neutral, with no direct stake in the issue (Laban *et al.*, 2005a; Moriarty *et al.*, 2005). An obvious critique to this statement, also expressed during the Symposium, is that no-one is neutral (McIntyre, 2005). Most stakeholders have various hats in a project. Moriarty *et al.* illustrate in Chapter 5 how the facilitation team has various roles within EMPOWERS that can be difficult to reconcile: facilitator, motivator, implementer, donor and learner. However, what is most important is that the team has legitimacy in the eyes of other platform members to facilitate the process, even when it is recognised that the facilitating organisation(s) has a stake in the issue.

It is not therefore surprising that the majority of organisations that facilitate learning alliances are knowledge institutes; often resource centres (RCs). These are "organisations or networks of organisations that provide support services to the water and sanitation sector, in an independent way, by making knowledge available to various sector players in a form they can use, and tailored to specific information needs" (based on Lieshout, 2005). In the WASH sector they often play a role similar to that of agricultural extension services in the agricultural sector; although they are often not positioned in the same way, for one thing, typically being independent of government. Because of their role in information brokering they are often perceived to be neutral or to have the legitimacy to facilitate learning processes. In addition, they may also carry out some of the activities mentioned in the previous sections, such as action research or dissemination. Finally, they typically have staff with the skills and

attitude required for process facilitation. Clear examples of knowledge institutes are, for example, CINARA in the TRANSCOL case, and CIAT in the case elaborated by Lundy and Gottret (Chapter 3). Many of the cases presented at the Symposium were initiated or facilitated by knowledge institutes or RCs, for example as described by Morris *et al.*, (2005) and Ahmed and Mittal (2005). Yet, the EMPOWERS case also shows that various government entities are also part of the facilitation team. In South Africa, a clear facilitator of the move towards a learning sector cannot be identified, as it was more a process that emerged. However, strong leadership from national government in the entire process is clear. Despite this, the Water Information Network (WIN) was specifically established as a resource centre to include both government and non-governmental organisations.

The cases also draw conclusions on the formation of the team:
• The facilitation team needs to cover various disciplines (engineering, social sciences, implementation, research and documentation), and have a gender balance.
• In many cases, not all the process facilitation skills may be available. In such cases, it takes time for the facilitation team to develop all the skills needed (Chapters 4 and 5).
• Facilitation takes time and money. This has major implications for programmes and projects using a learning alliance approach (see below).
• An issue that came up in the Symposium is whether process facilitators should have a thorough knowledge about the content of the issue at stake. It was felt that a good facilitating team does not necessarily have to consist of experts, but they should have at least good knowledge of the issue and strong contacts with content experts (McIntyre, 2005).

Despite these needs, none of the cases mentions how team members were recruited for their mix of personal traits, attitudes and technical skills, or if and how adjustments were made when gaps were found to be present. Teams in a participatory assessment for UNICEF of community water supply, environmental sanitation and hygiene in India used mutual assessment scores of nine characteristics to evaluate the skills of the team members. However, the scores did not have a bearing on team composition or the continued use of team members during the assessment itself, but served as a guide for future assignments and divisions of functions (Viju James, personal communication). Obviously, this is an area that requires further investigation.

Institutionalising facilitation

It has been mentioned that most learning alliance processes are initiated by those who stand (relatively) apart from the problem, such as knowledge institutes or projects. They often also take up the facilitation of these processes, again often in the form of a project. The question is whether there is need to continue such processes beyond the scope of a project and where then the facilitation skills will be located.

A risk in the current case experiences is that facilitating teams stick to their role and do not hand it over during the course of the process. Thus, Lundy and Gottret write how "CIAT has played a lead role in backstopping despite the fact that many partner agencies

possess important capacities that could facilitate processes". Visscher *et al.* observe that the facilitators "may have been too enthusiastic in taking the lead….they were still so new on the job that they were leaving fewer learning opportunities for the staff from the other agencies to practice as a process facilitator". This had repercussions in limiting the changes that participants could achieve within their own organisations. In the EMPOWERS process, the consolidation and testing phase is used to make this transition "with the country teams increasingly taking the back seat and allowing key stakeholders to manage the process for themselves, essential for the longer-term sustainability and replicability of the approaches".

The various cases also indicate that learning alliance processes often need to continue after a project ends. Indeed, if done properly, learning alliances generate demand for further learning processes. Visscher *et al.* report how demand for facilitating learning about MSF at the scale of TRANSCOL did not occur after the project, even though it was felt that the learning with the IRWGs had not finished. However, demand for learning on other topics was generated, and CINARA's services in this were requested by other parties (communities, local and regional authorities), taking it further in the form of the Joint Learning Projects (JLPs) (see García *et al.*, 1997; Restrepo, 2001). In EMPOWERS too, demand has been generated for the learning approach around IWRM. It is a big challenge, though, to move from a project to an institutionalised learning platform, if a sufficiently legitimate facilitator cannot easily be found (Chapter 5 and Laban *et al.*, 2005 a). Often, resource centres, or other knowledge institutes, are the ones with most legitimacy to institutionalise these skills. The agro-enterprise learning alliance in Latin America was the only example where the facilitation role was not institutionalised in a knowledge centre, but was left to the learning alliance members themselves. As a result, facilitation was institutionalised in local and international NGOs.

Programmatic and financial aspects of process facilitation

Process facilitation, or for that matter learning alliances, do not come for free. The amount of process facilitation required obviously depends on the size and complexity of the issue, the geographic area covered, the duration of the project, etc. Yet, a quick overview of some projects reveals the order of magnitude of human resources that are required simply for process facilitation alone (Table 7.1). Additional funds are required for action research, dissemination etc.

Table 7.1. Time dedicated to process facilitation

Project	Where	Process facilitation
CIAT Central America (Lundy and Gottret, Chapter 3)	Regions in 4 countries in Central America, total of 19 partner agencies	Team of 3 full time staff plus partner supported coordinators in two countries.
TRANSCOL (Visscher *et al.*, Chapter 4)	8 regions in Colombia, 2 pilots per region	Teams of 2 persons per region, dedicating about 25% of their time to process facilitation.
EMPOWERS (Moriarty *et al.*, Chapter 5)	1 governorate each in Jordan, Egypt and Palestine	1 full time equivalent per country for process facilitation in addition to specialists and project management.

As, Lundy and Gottret (Chapter 3) state: organisations only participate if the benefits of participating outweigh the transaction costs. This is especially the case where participating organisations themselves pay the bill, as they did initially to a large extent in CIAT's learning alliance. However, partners also saw the possibility of creating synergies by bringing in their own funds. Typically, implementing organisations have budgets for hardware and implementation activities but not for research. For researchers, it is the other way round. By coming together in a learning alliance, implementers get access to research and researchers get access to implementation projects around which to carry out action research. It is difficult at this stage to assess in a general way the full costs and benefits of the approach. The key message is that dedicated resources are required for proper facilitation.

Conclusions

The building of a learning alliance process requires multiple stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to come together to solve common problems jointly. This is not an easy process. Risks, which are common to any multi-stakeholder process, need to be dealt with in an adequate way. This chapter has shown the key steps in building such a process, the methodological building blocks, and findings around process facilitation. These provide a framework for building a learning alliance.

Being an interactive social learning process, a learning alliance does not follow a predefined activity plan. The case studies presented in the previous chapters and during the Symposium also show a wide variety of ways in which LAs evolved and worked. At the same time, a number of generic steps can be followed, such as stakeholder identification, problem or opportunity definition, stakeholder mobilisation and agreement on objectives, vision, mission and core values.

Methodological elements have been identified which are common to most learning alliances:
• Action research – as the main mechanism through which innovation takes place and through which capacity is built for scaling up
• Process monitoring and documentation – to help to identify which factors enable or hinder scaling up, and when potentially corrective action is needed
• Dissemination and sharing – both within and outside the LA

Process facilitation can best be understood by looking at the functions and activities required, including:
• Methodological guidance – weaving different generic activities together in a flexible and context-specific manner to arrive at a robust methodology
• Mediating communication, coordination and decision-making between all the stakeholders, so that everyone's participation is ensured, marginalised groups are empowered and conflicts are managed.

Carrying out process facilitation requires a set of skills and attitudes, especially to protect and empower marginalised groups, and to make a bridge between the different stakeholder perspectives. This does not necessarily have to be fulfilled by a single organisation or person, but can be distributed over a facilitation team. The team often comes from one or more knowledge institutes or resource centres as these organisations often have most legitimacy for facilitating complex processes with other sector stakeholders. However, government agencies or consultants may also take up these tasks. Government involvement would enable facilitation skills and learning processes to be institutionalised more broadly in government agencies. However, for now, it is more realistic to expect these skills to remain with knowledge institutes and RCs.

Setting up a facilitation team, and indeed a learning alliance process as such, is costly, especially in terms of dedicated time for facilitation. These costs can be covered through externally financed projects. However, donors may not be too keen to finance open-ended innovation and learning projects, in their pursuit of the MDGs. On the other hand, combining action research and project implementation proves to be an attractive combination, as it is a key mechanism for innovation and scaling up.

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Members of an inter-regional learning project discuss latrine options with project advisory committee members in Morrelganj, Bangladesh
Picture: Christine Sijbesma

8. Learning about learning alliances – reflections on findings and future

Christine Sijbesma, Stef Smits and Patrick Moriarty

Summary

This chapter reflects on the success or otherwise of learning alliances as analytical frameworks for thinking about scaling up innovations and sustainability in the WASH sector. As learning alliances are a relatively new phenomenon with few documented cases over a long period of time, this assessment only provides preliminary lessons, since some of the expected outcomes need a longer time frame. It appears that the main impact of learning alliances is in strengthened capacity for innovation and scaling up, at individual, organisational and institutional level. Impacts in terms of scaling up of innovations are less clear yet. The case studies suggest that all three elements of an LA – facilitated platforms, multiple stakeholders and multiple levels – are crucial for healthy innovation systems and for scaling up, and that the benefits reduce if even one element is lacking. These lessons have implications for taking learning alliances forward. Setting up platforms at different levels with multiple stakeholders takes time and resources. It seems difficult, therefore, to reconcile learning alliances with current project approaches, with their fixed time frames and deliverables. Yet, the cases also show how, with creativity, learning alliances can be linked to projects without losing a long-term learning perspective. This requires a supportive environment in the sector and in member organisations.

Introduction

Learning alliances are seen as an analytical framework for thinking about sustainability and scaling up of innovations in the WASH sector. In reflecting on this framework, we look at the findings from experiences presented in earlier chapters and at the IRC/UNESCO-IHE International Symposium on Learning Alliances in 2005. These reflections are organised into three categories based on expectations set out in Chapter 1 and in the background document to the 2005 Symposium (Moriarty *et al*., 2005):

- **Reflection on results and impacts**, set against the expected outcomes outlined in Chapter 1, namely, effective and locally relevant innovations, scaling out innovations or their principles, and capacity building for scaling up. We ask to what extent these have been achieved, and whether the results outweigh the costs.
- **Reflection on the key defining characteristics**, defined in Chapter 1 as multiple levels, multiple stakeholders and facilitated platforms. Are all these characteristics crucial for innovation and scaling up?
- **Reflection on the enabling environment**. The Symposium background document raised questions about the enabling environment in which learning alliances can take place. We formulate some points for consideration.

Learning alliances are a relatively new phenomenon, in the WASH sector in particular. Learning alliances look to the long term in terms of innovation and scaling up. However, few of the cases reviewed have been running for a long period, and this

clearly makes reflecting on the long-term impact problematic. Conclusions must, therefore, be regarded as preliminary.

Reflections on results and impacts

Chapter 1 defines the expected outcome of a learning alliance as the scaling up of innovative approaches. However, Smits *et al*. argue that scaling up may not always be directly visible, especially given the fact that local adaptation is needed. They therefore suggest that three intermediate results can be defined:

• Effective and locally relevant innovations
• Innovations or their principles scaled up (scaled out),
• Capacity for innovation and scaling up developed

Effective and locally relevant innovations

As in Chapter 1, we consider the development of innovations in a broad sense, not limited to "new" technology or approaches, but also adapting and applying existing approaches where they have not been applied successfully before. We can judge whether such innovations are locally relevant in terms of their acceptance by users. We can look at their effectiveness in terms of their impact on poverty and livelihoods.

Locally relevant

We have seen a range of cases where locally appropriate solutions have been developed. Chapter 4 describes improved water supply treatment technologies in Colombia and Chapter 7 mentions the locally specific solutions for pollution from tanneries reported by Restrepo *et al*. (2005). Innovations not only include technologies, but also innovative approaches to water management such as participatory management of water (Chapter 5) and the MUS approaches whereby water supply and sanitation cater for the consumptive and productive uses of local men and women (Koppen *et al.*, 2006).

Learning alliances have produced many other outputs that were the direct result of locally specific stakeholder needs and efforts. Lundy and Gottret list a number of products adjusted to local needs and demands of the different user groups, produced in two years by the Central American Learning Alliance (Chapter 3). A recent assessment by IDRC shows that the Central American Learning Alliance has had a significant impact on organisational focus and investment decisions. Currently under assessment are the impact of learning alliances on equity and governance issues in supply chains, the development of improved skills for the identification and development of sustainable business services and on the role of rural agro-enterprise development centres in supporting information and innovation processes. A major result of the learning alliance processes in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine has been the hands-on creation of concepts and tools that meet stakeholder needs, and the creation of a greater ownership of the participatory planning process (Chapter 5). These improvements are preconditions for sustained water and sanitation services.

Impact on poverty and gender

Are these innovations effective? Do they translate into improved water management and reduced poverty for all, women as well as men? Although the learning alliances featured in this book have a contribution to poverty reduction as one of their goals, there is limited information about whether poor men and women are better served. Although poverty reduction is a long-term aim, direct poverty alleviation is not the focus of a learning alliance, which supports intermediate level agencies to follow pro-poor approaches, and expects to impact on poverty through a cascade. This makes impact monitoring more difficult, and will require the adaptation of existing monitoring and evaluation tools to this end.

Poverty reduction is one of the objectives of the learning alliance approach pioneered by CIAT in Central America. The active involvement of diverse actors, including the poor themselves, in collective learning, adaptation and innovation is pursued with this broader goal in mind. An example is a study of the role played in rural development and poverty alleviation by market chains that are led by private companies and have smallholders as their customers. Their impact on poverty is yet to be assessed, but a study started in 2006 to analyse to what extent, and how, institutional innovations have contributed to sustainable livelihoods for rural families who are supported and/or backstopped by learning alliance partners.

Other learning alliances have not yet started measuring such impacts. Visscher *et al.* only report in Chapter 5 that the 16 demonstration MSF systems still work, albeit not in optimal conditions. Moriarty *et al.* stress that the final success of EMPOWERS, the access of poor people in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine to improved services, will only be measurable in the long term. Partly as a result of the learning experience, South Africa launched a two year programme to provide targeted support to providing basic services in the municipalities where the service backlogs are greatest and/or where levels of unemployment and poverty are greatest. This programme started only in 2005 and its impacts remain to be demonstrated.

Gender equality features explicitly in some of the learning alliances. The TRANSCOL project on multi-stage filtration in Colombia (Chapter 4) was able to find ways to deal with the gender restrictions that impede women's participation in the process. After three years of learning alliances in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, efforts to enhance community participation with men and women taking part in decision making have met with success. Water users attend meetings and there have been very satisfactory increases in the involvement of women, although measurement methods and other details are missing (Chapter 5).

Scaling up innovations

One of the major expectations of learning alliances is that its members will scale up innovations, by sustaining and supporting them and by adaptation and replication elsewhere. Chapter 1 makes a distinction between the geographical spread of specific innovations (scaling out) and their becoming part of the institutionalised way of acting

by the stakeholders (scaling up). This section first looks at scaling out. The next section looks into the issue of whether the approaches have been institutionalised among sector agencies.

There is some evidence that specific innovations have been and are being scaled out as a result of learning alliances. In Colombia, multi-stage filtration spread from 16 demonstration plants to more than 140 MSF systems all over the country. In Jordan, the learning alliance caught the attention of the Prime Minister's office and there is now interest in replicating the approach in all governorates in the country. In Palestine, the project is involved in reflections about institutionalising the approach in a future Water Facilitation Body. It is not only the technologies and new approaches that are being scaled up. Even the concept of a learning alliance as such is in some cases being scaled out, for example in the case of the learning alliance on agro-enterprise development, first from Central America to South America and then from South America to Africa.

However, a word of warning is due. Scaling out may be understood as replicating a certain technology or innovative approach elsewhere without adapting it to the local context. Lundy (personal communication) suggests looking at scaling up the principles of innovations, as the basis for local adaptation. An example of that is the MUS project (Koppen *et al*., 2006).

Capacity developed for innovation and scaling up
One might say that 'conventional' participatory approaches often achieve similar results to those outlined above. In a learning alliance, as with conventional participatory approaches, it is expected that sustainability will be enhanced and innovations institutionalised. So, why are learning alliances different? For one thing, a learning alliance aims to involve a wider range of stakeholders, especially from intermediate level organisations, including local government and the local private sector. These are crucial areas where innovations need to be institutionalised and the capacity to adapt innovations to local contexts needs to be strengthened. This requires capacity to be developed at three levels:
• Individual (human resources) development
• Organisational development
• Institutional development.

Human resources
It was anticipated that individual members of a learning alliance would learn mainly from being involved in activities, strengthening their skills and knowledge and expanding their networks.

Which capacities are developed greatly depends on what the participating stakeholders want for themselves. In the Central American Learning Alliance (Chapter 3), three different clusters of partners emerged with different learning interests. One group was interested in enhancing their capacities and skills to support local processes; a second group was interested in developing, testing and documenting new methods, tools and

approaches; and a third group wanted a better grasp of key principles and lessons for policy adjustments. Effective capacity building is therefore partly user-driven, as partners only remain members of a learning alliance when their participation brings the kind of benefits they seek.

Significantly, in all cases, individual skill development took place. In EMPOWERS, local government staff increased their understanding of participatory approaches to water management and changed their practice as a result (Chapter 5). In Colombia, skills development has been mixed across various individual stakeholders. Those who were members of the learning process did indeed develop a range of new knowledge and skills related to a new technology and to the socio-organisational processes underlying its adoption (Chapter 4). Many years later, staff who were involved in the learning process still value the skills they obtained and feel it was a good way of building their capacity. But not all members developed those skills equally. For example, when it came to operation and maintenance (O&M) and management activities, community members developed skills to a greater extent than members of the Inter-Institutional Regional Working Groups (IRWGs). Their skills were to some extent sustained, despite the short learning period.

One of the skills which was least developed was the capacity for adaptive management, i.e. extracting lessons and principles from innovations, and adapting them elsewhere according to the local context. This implies a good understanding of the contextual factors that make innovations work in one place, but not in another. This is clearly an area where much learning remains to be done as none of the learning alliances discussed here has yet shown that capacity for adaptive management has been successfully built. It will remain an important part of reviewing and reporting on learning alliances to show on which aspects adaptive management relies and to what extent. Is it merely a matter of more knowledge and skills, as Smits *et al.* say (Chapter 1), or is it also a different way of thinking, as held by Proost and Leeuwis (Chapter 2)?

The key mechanism for learning seems to be interaction with others in the platform. Peer-to-peer interactions were a key mechanism leading to improved capacities in provincial forums in South Africa (Chapter 6). Members began to appreciate the value of platforms for exchanging practices and lessons. As they gained better knowledge of provincial and national initiatives, learning from peers was greatly enhanced. In the agricultural sector, peer-to-peer interactions allowed individuals to draw on wider knowledge networks via the learning alliance, as well as to share their capacities and knowledge with others inside and outside their organisations (Chapter 3).

Some factors may limit individual learning. For example, the enthusiasm of the facilitating agency in taking the lead on new subject areas and processes can reduce learning opportunities for staff from other agencies as happened in Colombia (Chapter 4). In the EMPOWERS project, this danger is being avoided since the country teams are increasingly taking a back seat and allowing key stakeholders to manage the process for themselves (Chapter 5).

Proost and Leeuwis (Chapter 2) criticise the learning alliance approach for being too focused on knowledge and skills, the cognitive side of learning, and too little on feelings, attitudes and values, the emotional side. It can be argued that in capacity development too, there has been an over-strong focus on knowledge and skills. Although all the cases demonstrate a sympathetic approach to empowering people, especially poor people, it is not yet sufficiently clear how learning alliances build the inherent values, attitudes and beliefs at intermediate level to support these pro-poor approaches. Which values, attitudes and beliefs have changed, for example, with regard to issues of gender and social equity and governance? How this has been attempted is not revealed in the case studies. Why, for example, despite attention to these aspects by facilitating agencies, did the sociological work on planning and implementation of participatory approaches, with a strong emphasis on women's participation, not survive in the IRWGs in the TRANSCOL project in Colombia? Was this merely a consequence of the lack of social science skills in the IRWGs and a failure to obtain support from higher levels of management? Or was it also, as Proost and Leeuwis might suggest, that the transfer of knowledge and skills predominated in the learning process, rather than the acquisition of new attitudes, values and beliefs? Does this also explain why local governments in South Africa persisted in using target driven, top-down implementation methods in spite of the decentralisation of the development and management of water supply and sanitation to local level? If so, does this make it likely that successful experiences in communications between officials and villagers documented in the EMPOWERS project will remain anecdotal? Proost and Leeuwis state in Chapter 2 that the desire to achieve technology transfer is not usually primarily about changing social relationships, which also requires a change of context. On the other hand, starting to work on practical things (skills for engineering, etc), which is of immediate need and interest, may be a first stepping stone towards changing slowly attitudes and beliefs. García (personal communication) comments that staff involved in TRANSCOL slowly started to develop new attitudes and some staff even started their own NGOs in other parts of Colombia.

It should be understood, however, that the development of human capacity is not a short-term, linear process. In most cases, there is a need for the facilitating agency – and indirectly any donor agency– to accept a less detailed advance planning process in favour of iterative learning and adjustment. In this sense, not only do learning alliance participants enter a learning process, but so too do the facilitating and funding agencies.

Sector organisations
For innovations to be scaled up, they must be institutionalised in sector organisations. Yet many of these organisations are currently disempowered, because of early or incomplete processes of decentralisation, and many lack capacity, incentives, financial resources etc. Learning alliances aim to work within this reality by trying to strengthen sector organisations. A key mechanism here is the institutionalisation of lessons by individual learning alliance members in their home organisations.

However, this is arguably the level where change is most difficult, as witnessed by some of the cases in this book. Visscher *et al.* (Chapter 4) for example report on the fate of the organisations who were members of the IRWGs. While the capacities of the individual learning alliance members had been built, they had great difficulty in bringing the lessons back to their home organisations because their colleagues had not been part of the learning process. Long-term organisational strengthening lagged behind. The provincial health departments did not adopt the new approach because the national level, which had not been involved as a platform, changed their mandate. In the technical universities, the curricula included the technology but not the social processes. While the Colombian learning alliance has not led to sustained learning about the social processes involved in multi-stage filtration, it did create a demand for other learning projects from a range of other organisations dealing with community water supply and sanitation. The fact that these organisations have themselves asked for such projects, increases the chance that they will strengthen their subject and process skills to a greater extent than in the TRANSCOL project.

But things are not always that difficult. In EMPOWERS, the approach was so institutionalised in government agencies that they are even applying the lessons in sectors other than the water sector (Chapter 5). One should also be clear about what organisations want to get out of a process. Organisational strengthening can take different forms, depending on which kind of learning the organisations themselves seek to gain. In Central America, Lundy and Gottret found three types of learning amongst organisations involved in the learning alliance: some sought to improve their internal learning practices, others to improve their development interventions while others focused on the development and use of specific developmental tools. They report that after two years of work, the Central American learning alliance has achieved important gains in the development of partner capacity and the adaptation of tools to regional needs. A recent assessment also showed significant impacts on organisational focus and investment decisions, better information exchange and more mutual learning (Chapter 3, Table 3.2).

Organisational benefits may change over time. Chapter 6 describes how organisations in South Africa first joined a platform to enhance their delivery capacity and to implement the national water and sanitation programme more effectively. Five years later, they identified lesson learning from each other as a new and major objective. Learning alliance processes are further seen an important mechanism "to minimise 'reinventing the wheel' and to avoid repeating the same mistakes" (Chapter 6 p 14).

Unrolling pipes for a community water supply system in South Africa. Stakeholders started by wanting to enhance service delivery, but later came to value the learning experience as a way to avoid reinventing the wheel or repeating mistakes.
Picture: Stef Smits

It is not only learning alliance member organisations that can be strengthened, but also organisations taking on the role of facilitator with a mandate to support developments in the sector. This was the case in Colombia where CINARA grew tremendously as an organisation as a result of facilitating the TRANSCOL process, and starting to develop ownership over the participatory process. However, it had first to undergo organisational change to take the methodologies of the projects further and to position itself better in the sector.

These changes are not easy. The steep learning curves faced by individuals involved in such a process was elaborated in detail in Chapter 5. As the facilitators and the other stakeholders grappled with new approaches, the first one and a half years of the EMPOWERS project were characterised by a state of chaos and insecurity for partners. Yet this proved a useful period, creating time to adjust the personal profiles of country team members before recruitment and building ownership, confidence and skills among learning alliance members. The learning alliances developed some guidelines to replicate the approach in other provinces, and have been able to hold a number of training and awareness raising workshops in the region. A core group felt so strengthened that they have formed a partnership to advocate for and support the scaling up of the philosophy and methodologies of the project while protecting the quality of the participatory processes.

The flip side of the coin is that there may be over-reliance on the facilitating organisations. Visscher *et al.* reported that this has been the case in Colombia. A similar limitation occurred in Central America where the learning alliance process strengthened the capacity of the existing support organisation, CIAT, but inhibited other partners who had backstopping and coaching capacities from taking up such roles (Chapter 3). On the other hand, one could argue that facilitating learning processes requires such specialist skills that it will remain difficult in the short term to institutionalise the role in other sector organisations.

Perhaps the most important aspect of organisational learning in a learning alliance approach lies not in the internalisation of new skills, roles and facilitation abilities, but rather in a willingness to work in a collaborative fashion with other actors in the system. In this sense, the limitations highlighted above should be viewed as processes of incremental change that are expected to deepen through continuing interaction with other actors. As mentioned in Chapter 2, processes of change are welcomed by some actors and resisted by others. The partial nature of the institutional learning shown here would seem to provide evidence of precisely such a process of 'negotiated' change.

Institutional development

Not only individual and organisational capacities are strengthened in a learning process. Through working together in the platform, organisational relations – or transparent links, as Lundy and Gottret call them (Chapter 3) – are also strengthened. More broadly, 'social capital' can also be expected to be developed (McIntyre, 2005).

Improved institutional relations primarily evolve through the mutual benefits of improved information sharing and the development of joint activities. Probably the clearest evidence can be found in South Africa. Chapter 6 shows how a sector wide approach, institutional reforms and the learning process have gone hand in hand, creating better opportunities for capacity development for local authorities. Many recognised and appreciated the ability of collaboration to break down 'silos'. "By collaborating around strategies, planning and reporting, the true value had become the platform for exchanging experiences and lessons." (Chapter 6: p 12) In the agricultural sector, one result has been the increasing development of joint proposals and initiatives that seek to complement existing skill sets and geographic areas of work and to promote advocacy vis-à-vis key government policy making bodies (Chapter 3). An important benefit of inter-agency cooperation in Latin America has been that implementers can access resources for research, and researchers can access resources for implementation and jointly try out different approaches and innovations (Chapter 7).

The cases say less about other types of improved relations, such as better accountability between communities, as users of innovations, and intermediate level agencies, as providers or supporters of innovations. In Chapter 3, Lundy and Gottret mention the double loop learning cycle: going back to users to evaluate the results of an intervention and using the information to select and define new learning topics and to repeat the learning cycle if results are not optimal. Moriarty *et al.* give an example of how the

learning alliance approach helped a local community stand up to the Jordan Valley Authority in their efforts to increase their share of irrigation water (Chapter 5 Box 5.1).

However, Harris *et al.* (Chapter 6) stressed that one of the reasons why collaboration between stakeholders in South Africa succeeded was because good relationships and a good understanding existed at the start. Lundy and Gottret (Chapter 3) report that participation in learning alliances takes place in the absence of conflicts over key interests. This shows a chicken-and-egg situation: good inter-institutional relations are a prerequisite for learning, but joint learning is needed to develop good relationships. This does not necessarily mean that there is a stalemate. Some important lessons are learnt on how to get out of the deadlock. Lundy and Gottret (Chapter 3) report how understanding the relative importance of each partner in the learning alliance and their principal need or expectation has been important to manage conflicting interests and identify possible synergies between clusters.

It is not always easy to bring about this better understanding of each other's viewpoint. The stakes are too high, the conflicts of interest too ingrained, and the opportunities for the abuse of power too many. Conflicts are, however, not necessarily a bad thing; they are often needed to bring about change. The main issue is how conflicting interests are dealt with. Proost and Leeuwis (Chapter 2) even see conflicts as inherent to learning alliances that address more than superficial change. "Innovation implies changes in the status quo, which is always accompanied by friction and tension, especially when innovations go beyond simply optimising results within established frameworks and goals. Negotiation and conflict management are important areas of attention…. In innovation, conflict is central to change and can be a positive force for dealing with conflicts, instead of avoiding them."
(Chapter 2 p 25…p 32). The role of facilitation is crucial in this. In Colombia, the politicised environment of the water and sanitation sector made it difficult for groups of people to look beyond their individual perspectives. The ability of the facilitators was crucial in establishing an environment of respect for conflicting views and a willingness to give ground on individual viewpoints (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 observes that embarking on a highly participatory planning process – involving a wide range of different stakeholders at different levels – cannot work without a strong and experienced process facilitator.

Costs and benefits of learning alliances

While the authors report many benefits, they are far less clear on costs. EMPOWERS gives the available budget over four years as five million Euros for three countries and a regional dissemination unit; approximately four million for methodology development and one million for pilot studies (Chapter 5). The learning alliance in which CIAT is involved has a budget of US$ 439,000 over four years to cover four countries and 19 direct partner agencies, who, in turn, work with approximately 40 other organisations (Lundy, personal communication). Detailed reporting of costs can give an indication of what is required to facilitate a learning alliance in different countries, especially if the costs are broken down for various activities.

An important question is whether these costs outweigh the benefits, especially when compared to other (conventional) approaches. At this stage, no specific answer can be given. Even if the benefits were quantified, it would be difficult to compare them with the benefits from other approaches, since the contexts in which projects and processes happen are different enough to prevent sensible comparison. What is more important is to assess results against expectations, and to compare results with more conventional approaches in a qualitative way. Quantitative information on costs would be of use in setting benchmarks, but should be handled with caution, given the completely different contexts in which resources are used and results obtained.

Reflection on defining characteristics of learning alliances

Smits *et al.* identified in Chapter 1 three key structural characteristics needed by a learning alliance to achieve innovation and scaling up: work at multiple levels, involving multiple stakeholders and facilitated platforms. What do the case studies tell us about the importance of these factors, and why they matter?

Multiple levels

The key premise of a learning alliance is that work needs to be done at all levels, from the micro (community) level to the intermediate (district and provincial) level and the macro (national) level. In the WASH sector, the intermediate level is of particular importance, as that is where the service authority and the support functions for communities reside. This is the level where capacity development is most critically needed.

Failing to involve certain levels may seriously limit the ability of learning alliances to achieve scaling up. In Colombia, for example, the national level was insufficiently involved, since the highest level platform comprised only the two leading implementers/facilitating agencies. The project succeeded in scaling up the technology, which became a subject in universities in four of the five regions. However, the absence of some critical national level stakeholders was a factor in failing sufficiently to change the education curriculum to incorporate the social approach as an essential component of learning about the innovation. The best that could be achieved was a training project of short courses on management culture (Chapter 4).

Where links have been made between platforms at different levels, this has yielded positive results. In South Africa, platforms have been established at provincial level where lessons learnt about WASH services are exchanged. This is supported by a platform at national level. Linkages between the national and provincial level have been developed, for example, by taking lessons from provincial to national level. Elsewhere in South Africa, a local NGO, Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD) established a strong multi-stakeholder learning process at municipal level, but did not make linkages with national platforms, and this limited take up at higher levels (Du Toit, 2005).

Multiple stakeholders

Another learning alliance premise is that different types of stakeholders need to be present at each level to bring together different perspectives and to make innovations more relevant and more broadly supported. However, there are no hard rules about who should be involved. It seems that government agencies and knowledge institutes are the common denominators. One could argue that these would always be needed; governments because they have the mandate and position to scale up innovations, and knowledge institutes because they can facilitate learning alliances and bring in specific bodies of knowledge. Other members depend on the situation. It is noted, though, that local private sector agencies were absent from all the WASH case learning alliances presented. No clear reason was found for this.

Lundy and Gottret argue that participation is defined by the common interests that participants identify and negotiate. Because joining is voluntary and the benefits derive from the activities rather than from a financial stake, members stay as long as they think that the expected benefits will surpass their costs (Chapter 2). Joining by choice may have the limitation that key stakeholders are left out, do not choose to participate or are not encouraged to join. In South Africa, the participation of NGOs and knowledge institutes remains weak in learning platforms, especially at provincial and local level, limiting the innovation process (Chapter 6). This may have been a factor in the failure of the learning alliance approach to change the way that municipalities operate in South Africa. It seems that especially the provincial forums, where implementers meet, could have benefited from a greater participation of NGOs. Stakeholder analyses can be done on a continuous basis to ensure that no key stakeholders are left out (Chapter 7).

In some cases, new institutions may need to be set up to participate in the learning alliance process. EMPOWERS found that new bodies had to be created for the participation of women and the management of water at the community level (Chapter 5). Empowerment of marginal groups may be needed to ensure that they can speak out and influence the work (Chapter 7). At higher levels too, new institutions may be needed. Lundy mentions the need to bring different government departments together to improve supply chains (personal communication).

Children at toilets introduced as part of a school sanitation programme in Nicaragua. Through learning alliances, and a combination of software, hardware and 'orgware', innovations in school sanitation can be scaled up. Picture: Stef Smits

Facilitated platforms

Finally, stakeholders at different levels do not just come together spontaneously. There is need for a facilitated space or platform where stakeholders meet and learn.

A first element of the facilitated platforms is their focus on innovation and learning. Proost and Leeuwis point out that learning alliances make it possible to bring together three basic components for innovation: *software* which deals with human processes for bringing about change, *orgware* which is about enabling these processes in the organisational environment and *hardware*, the technological innovations that are part of the changes pursued. This confirms that these learning processes are indeed about innovations. It is not only about the process and the institutions; innovations are a central element, around which platforms evolve.

Guzha (2005) confirms this, in his analysis of the various networks, which bring together multiple stakeholders in the Zimbabwean WASH sector. Although these networks have in general resulted in increased coordination of activities between sector organisations, they did not focus on innovation and learning, and few results have been achieved in the horizontal scaling up of innovative approaches from one organisation to another.

Although all the cases describe platforms, the authors make very clear that there is no set way to organise and manage them. Learning alliances involve processes as well as systems and use dynamic and flexible approaches. It is therefore not surprising that several variations and adaptations may be going on at the same time and in different places. In South Africa, each province has its own issues and conditions with different priorities and structures, so there can be no blueprint.

Platforms need to be facilitated. Proost and Leeuwis point out that this requires a process expert. But facilitation can be organised in different ways. Smits *et al.* discuss various aspects of facilitation, including where the facilitator comes from, what skills and attitudes they should possess, and the possibility of working in teams (Chapter 7). Facilitation does seem to be indispensable. Only in South Africa was there no facilitating team. Yet, there the platforms were already institutionalised, providing the structure in which learning could take place.

Conclusion

This review suggests that all three elements – multiple levels, multiple stakeholders and facilitated platforms – are indeed crucial for thinking about effective innovations and scaling up. Leaving out one element may limit the potential. This does not mean that learning alliances are the next 'silver bullet' or even prove that they are a superior approach; it does show that each of these three elements should be valued as being of use in structuring the analysis of innovations and their scaling up in the WASH sector. At the same time, these qualities may also serve as guiding principles in projects, programmes and processes of learning.

Reflection on the enabling environment

Factors outside the learning alliance can affect its functioning, for better or worse. There are also some basic prerequisites which might be needed for a learning alliance to function effectively. In considering the enabling environment, we look first at the external environment – the policy and institutional factors that enable learning alliances to develop – and then at the internal conditions for how learning alliances are organised and financed, and to what extent these are compatible with the predominant project approaches in the WASH sector.

Policies and institutions
Learning alliances ultimately aim to change policies and institutions to support innovations in the WASH sector. Yet, the current policy and institutional framework in a country may not be conducive to a learning environment. To what extent are enabling policies and institutions a pre-condition for, or a consequence of effective learning alliances?

Only in the South African example (Chapter 6) does it clearly emerge that policy and legislation are conditions for the emergence of multi-stakeholder platforms for more sustained water and sanitation services. In Chapter 4, Visscher *et al.* do mention how vertical relationships between platforms ended when the health department's mandate

changed and funding was reduced. However, the full range of policies and legislation that support or hinder community managed water treatment systems does not emerge from the study. Neither does Chapter 3 describe the policy environment on commerce and trade in which the Rural Agro-enterprise Development Project of CIAT operates, although the authors mention in their abstract that one objective of the alliance is to advocate more relevant policy agendas for rural development. More information is clearly required on how the platforms and activities can influence and inform policies and legislation, and likewise how policies and legislation enable or hinder the learning alliance approach.

The move towards decentralisation is a key institutional characteristic which both enables learning alliances to develop, and demonstrates why they are needed. It is clearly an important reason why intermediate levels especially need new attitudes, knowledge and capacities, as their implementation role switches to one of governance and support. It is precisely at this level where learning alliances have their greatest focus. As Lundy and Gottret write: "The majority of our learning occurs with actors who support and influence farmers and their organisations, including local and international NGOs, universities, government agencies and private sector firms. Through more structural learning processes, the learning alliance seeks to affect change in the larger innovation system in a way that provides support for subsequent innovation in rural communities" (Chapter 3 p 42). In TRANSCOL, the pivotal platform was made up of the IRWGs in eight regions, which worked closely with the 18 municipalities and communities. This provided the experience, on the basis of which the community-managed water treatment system of multi-stage filtration was scaled up. In Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, and in South Africa, water resources management and water supply and sanitation had also been decentralised to intermediate level.

Time, resources and tension
A learning alliance with multiple stakeholders at various levels and good facilitation invariably takes time to establish. The process of interesting a handful of stakeholders in a concept, then inviting several other stakeholders to initiate a process, and then keeping the process going while building a coalition of stakeholders, takes time, resources and commitment. Table 7.1 shows the time dedicated to process facilitation in four projects. The eventual outcomes from this investment may come much later. Some "quick wins" are often needed to keep stakeholders interested, since learning without tangible results may not hold people's interest. Yet, concrete outputs are sometimes possible within a relatively short period. In Central America, the learning alliance facilitated by CIAT produced an impressive number of products after only two years of work (Chapter 3). Maintaining a learning alliance over time is another important challenge, as development is an iterative learning process. Lundy and Gottret stress that "to stay vibrant, a learning alliance must adapt and change as learning occurs and new questions arise" (Chapter 3 p 52).

These large time spans also imply extra resources. Special funds for starting a learning alliance were available in all the cases included in this volume. But longer-term learning processes require ongoing funding, which is less easy to find. In Colombia, the learning alliance on water treatment ended when external funding stopped and not

enough support for the technical and social innovations had been levered at provincial level. Lundy and Gottret stress the importance of longer-term relationships: "To influence positive change and understand why that change has occurred requires long-term, stable relationships capable of evolving to meet new challenges" (Chapter 3: p 43). They suggest placing ongoing funding high on the agenda, linking learning alliances either to large development initiatives or to dissemination, training, and monitoring and evaluation budgets. As part of this, they would ask the members for their own contribution to the costs of the facilitation of the process.

Funding for action research is another matter. In the agro-enterprise learning alliance, they search for research funds from third parties, not from the members themselves. However, in the past, strong partner commitment and links with an existing initiative made it possible for the Andean Region Learning Alliance to finance research in three of the four identified themes without external funds (Chapter 3). The authors conclude that such decisions are best left to the partner agencies themselves, as some partners had argued that each should raise its own funds, while others felt that to achieve positive change, they should together seek funds for joint activities. The same difference of opinion has been voiced in the EMPOWERS project. In the TRANSCOL project, the participating partners could find their own funds for the construction of water treatment systems when the external financer "agreed to shift funds originally earmarked for construction to training and facilitation, allowing a much longer and more frequent intervention by the teams from CINARA" (Chapter 5 p 75).

In Chapter 2, Proost and Leeuwis stress that the learning processes for social change not only need money and time but often bring feelings of discomfort. This is especially true for those used to seeing development processes as linear rather than cyclic and iterative. Moriarty *et al.* also report (Chapter 5) how in a centralised and top-down system, different ways of learning bring discomfort, as learning alliance members expect facilitators to 'know it all'. In such a culture it is difficult for facilitators to admit uncertainty or ignorance in front of others. Along with conflicts of interests, this ensures that learning alliances are not a smooth ride as a transition vehicle, but one which moves by leaps and bounds and occasionally turns over.

Fitting in with existing project approaches

Much of current development thinking, particularly in the WASH sector, has a number of traits which, at first sight, make it incompatible with the learning alliance approach. Firstly, much of the sector is still focused almost exclusively on numerical targets to increase coverage, with only cursory and formulaic attention given to quality and sustainability. Only trifling percentages of budgets are set aside for capacity building and other software components. Secondly, many funding agencies, international donors and national government agencies adhere strictly to short-term project approaches that concentrate on input/output ratios, and they shy away from anything that looks like an open-ended learning process where no clear outputs are defined beforehand.

Can learning alliances function in a sector environment of output focus, short-term goals, and log-frames? Can project approaches be adapted to suit programmatic and long-term thinking? The immediate and theoretical answer to the first question is *no*, as learning is an iterative process in which the participants critically reflect on the underlying framework before starting a new cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation. Individual members in an LA may fade out and in, depending on whether they perceive that they obtain benefits that outweigh the costs and are higher than those obtained by working individually. This natural process of periodic turnover is related to the changing needs and aspirations of project partners. The issue is not that there are changes in participants, but that sufficient stability and a critical mass of partners for the envisaged development are maintained (Chapter 3). Such open processes are not compatible with project approaches as outlined above.

So learning alliances do not function well on a typical project basis with set partners and narrow timeframes. Ideally, they continue to develop and apply products and strategies as and when needed for a particular development process.

Yet, the various cases also show that learning alliances have found creative ways of linking with predominant approaches and benefiting from them. When learning alliances themselves are financed as a project with a limited time and predefined products, the chances are that the alliance will stop when the project is over. This happened with the TRANSCOL project. Moriarty *et al.* are more optimistic for the EMPOWERS project (Chapter 5), provided that the institutional homes that have been identified for the country alliances prove to work and provided that resources are found so that they can have regular cooperation with participants and produce products after the project ends. They point out that for an alliance to work, a longer start-up period is needed: one year rather than the usual 3-6 months. This implies a need for advocacy to find funding for more enlightened approaches than conventional linear projects, and to take into account the quality of processes rather than purely quantitative outputs. Alternatively, one could argue that learning alliance members contribute to the facilitation themselves. In the Latin American alliances in which CIAT is involved, members are looking into new modalities to achieve that (Lundy, personal communication). There is possibly some room for this approach in the WASH sector as well. Some international NGOs lead the way in valuing learning processes, as witnessed by some new initiatives that are emerging that follow a learning alliance approach (see below).

Another way of looking at the financing is by considering whether learning alliances can involve themselves in implementation projects in their areas. Smits *et al.* point out that "it often proves useful to bring these cycles of learning into line with the project or planning cycles through which sector organisations may work anyway, or to use action research to strengthen such cycles, as in the case of EMPOWERS" (Chapter 7 p 128). Lundy and Gottr*et al*so point to links between learning alliances and ongoing projects. "The learning alliance facilitates the use of selected or designed tools, methods, approaches and strategies within ongoing development projects, validating their usefulness and adapting them to fit different contexts.… Finally, participating partner

organisations apply the approaches and toolkits in the context of existing development projects, document the results and share them with others" (Chapter 3 p 45).

To the question of whether it is better to adapt project approaches to suit programmatic and long-term thinking, not only when forming learning alliances, but also when applying learning in developments on the ground, there is no immediate answer. Having a long-term SWAP for domestic water supply and sanitation was certainly helpful in South Africa when setting up national and regional platforms for sector policies, cooperation, integration and implementation, but this is only one case. It is obviously important that an answer to this question is sought in the coming years.

Scaling up learning alliances? New initiatives and outstanding issues

Learning alliances are a new and promising phenomenon in the development sector, which are finding new applications in the WASH sector, and even in broader water management. Because of their novelty, it is not surprising that there is limited information on how promises are realised. In Chapter 2 Proost and Leeuwis discuss seven reasons why learning alliances constitute a powerful idea:
• They address the different aspects of innovations
• They can be developed with existing networks
• They open new opportunities for scaling up
• They combine the uptake of technological innovations with changing of social relationships
• Learning and documentation can begin at the very start and continue as the LA develops
• They allow a start to be made with the most interested organisations
• They make power relations part of the process.

The potential of learning alliances is also witnessed by the fact that various other projects and programmes have started following at least some key elements of an LA approach. Examples can be found in the SWITCH project (UNESCO-IHE, 2006) on urban water management and the MUS project (Koppen *et al*., 2006). These and other projects will provide more insights into whether learning alliances can indeed fulfil the powerful promises made on their behalf. It would therefore be crucial for these projects to work with the key characteristics of a learning alliance, to ensure that the full potential of innovation and scaling up is achieved, and to focus on some essential issues where current documentation and analysis is deficient; in particular:
• Monitoring impacts, in terms of innovations, scaling out, capacity development and institutionalisation
• Paying attention to context in terms of policies and institutions, costs and links with project and programmes.
Such insight would be of great help in further mainstreaming the learning alliance concepts in the WASH sector.

Scaling up promising approaches, technically, socially, institutionally and environmentally, is widely acknowledged as essential for achieving general and

sustained access to, and use of, improved water supply, sanitation and hygiene practices, and for the management of water and the environment as fundamental and vulnerable resources. Addressing these issues will greatly improve our learning about learning alliances and enable these and similar approaches to be scaled up themselves, fulfilling the promise identified by all the various authors in this volume.

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About IRC

IRC facilitates the sharing, promotion and use of knowledge so that governments, professionals and organisations can better support poor men, women and children in developing countries to obtain water and sanitation services they will use and maintain. It does this by improving the information and knowledge base of the sector and by strengthening sector resource centres in the South.

As a gateway to quality information, the IRC maintains a Documentation Unit and a web site with a weekly news service, and produces publications in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese both in print and electronically. It also offers training and experience-based learning activities, advisory and evaluation services, applied research and learning projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America; and conducts advocacy activities for the sector as a whole. Topics include community management, gender and equity, institutional development, integrated water resources management, school sanitation, and hygiene promotion.

IRC staff work as facilitators in helping people make their own decisions; are equal partners with sector professionals from the South; stimulate dialogue among all parties to create trust and promote change; and create a learning environment to develop better alternatives.

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Learning Alliances: Scaling up innovations in water, sanitation and hygiene

Massive efforts are put into developing innovative approaches that will rapidly increase access to sustainable water and sanitation services and deliver improved hygiene practices. These innovations often lead to local success, but most remain isolated. One of the main reasons is that innovations do not become institutionalised and sector institutions lack sufficient capacity to adapt promising innovations to changing circumstances and to support their longer-term development.

Learning alliances have emerged at least partly in response to this blockage, to create a platform for joint learning and innovation. They provide a structure to link users of water and sanitation services, district or provincial level organisations with responsibility for service provision and support, and national policy makers. They aim to strengthen institutional capacity at all these levels to develop, support and scale up innovation.

Learning alliances is a relatively new concept in development, particularly in the water sector. This state of the art report provides:
• a conceptual introduction to learning alliances
• case studies of current practice in Latin America, South Africa and the Middle East
• a critical reflection about lessons learnt, in regard to both practice and outcomes
• an analysis of remaining questions and uncertainties

This book brings together theory and practice to examine the challenges of widespread innovative change in a real-world setting. It is in the first place geared towards water sector professionals with an interest in strengthening the developmental impacts of research and innovation, the scaling up of innovative implementation practices, and new approaches for capacity development. It will also have a wider appeal for anyone with an interest in the practical application of learning methods, innovation and change.

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