

Perspectives on Knowledge Sharing in Research

The knowledge Sharing project of

ict-km
Collaborate, Create, Communicate
A PROGRAM OF THE CGIAR

IWMI
International
Water Management
Institute

CGIAR

Research project: IWMI WASPA project

KS approach: Learning Alliance

Perspective: Members of the Farmers' organisation

The 'Wastewater, Agriculture and Sanitation for Poverty Alleviation (WASPA)' project being run by IWMI is using a Learning Alliance approach in the project as part of the Knowledge Sharing in Research Project piloting activities.

One of the key stakeholders in this project are farmers who receive water from the end of a canal system to irrigate their agriculture-rice paddies. Over time the water from the canal has become polluted with both liquid and solid, organic and inorganic waste from a number of sources along its path- city, industry, and other communities. This has created a situation in which the farmers are using wastewater for their paddy fields with many consequences for health and livelihoods.

On the monitoring visit to the project site in Sri Lanka-Kurunegala, KSiR's Project Leader had the opportunity to talk to some of the farmers from this affected community, mostly those actively involved in the Farmers' Organisation which represents these farmers in the WASPA Learning Alliance.

When asked if they knew about or were involved in the Learning Alliance-a number of them indicated that they were involved in the Learning Alliance and had attended meetings.

"Under the WASPA project the Learning Alliance has allowed us to share information with others and to learn alot from other groups too" commented one of the farmers before any further questions could be asked.

One key success of the Learning Alliance, which these farmers shared with me, was the ability to share their issues of solid waste coming from the canal into their fields with relevant groups, with the hope that they could help to address this issue. The Learning Alliance gave them the opportunity to share also their idea of putting in a garbage trap at the diversion canal to stop the solid waste coming down the canal to their fields. Through the Learning Alliance a collaborative effort took place around this idea. More information on this possible technological option was researched by some actors, a design was proposed by the irrigation department, discussions about location were had between various stakeholders, and a joint effort for putting in the garbage trap was undertaken. This process was something unseen before.



Credit: IWMI WASPA

Through the Learning Alliance and the Participatory Action Plans-jointly decided in the LA- being implemented through this mechanism, the farmers learned alot about the water they are using and the situations contributing to the pollution. They were happy that information from the various research surveys and tests undertaken in the WASPA project was shared with them through the Learning Alliance. This really helped to build their trust as they believed that their participation would have some benefit as they were delivered knowledge from projects, as promised.

When asked what it was about the Learning Alliance they felt was positive, one of the farmers replied, *"the WASPA Learning Alliance allowed us to share our problems. In the Learning Alliance we got the chance to share our views and problems with relevant authorities"*.

A major positive element of the LA approach for the farmers was the opportunity for them to meet and discuss with multiple organisations which play a role in various aspects affecting their lives.

When pressed as to why there should be a LA approach rather than organising small group meetings for them with other

organisations, the farmers said that they liked the big, open platform where many groups could sit together from many disciplines and sectors to share knowledge, plan actions that are beneficial to everyone and to decide on who will do what.

The benefit of coming together, from the farmer perspective, was not only to talk about project activities but also to have access to other groups to discuss other, related matters such as timing of opening of irrigation anicuts. In this way the forum creates a larger opportunity for sharing knowledge, discussing, and decision-making.

The farmers commented that it was more effective to bring up issues and ideas in this bigger forum as they have visited certain departments many times with no action being made to address their issues. In the LA, actions are more likely as various groups present may offer to share the workload, and promises that are made in front of others in this setting so are more likely to be kept.

Some **issues** that were raised with regards to the Learning Alliance by the farmers were:

- Since the project area for WASPA, and consequently the boundaries of the Learning Alliance, stretches across various political boundaries, it made it difficult to involve all the relevant authorities and caused some confusion about which political authority was responsible for certain people, areas and actions.
- The farmers were concerned with who they would raise issues with after the project and Learning Alliance was finished- and how they would now get actions done to address their issues.

[Note: A question of sustainability of the beneficial process that has been initiated through the Learning Alliance--not just of the Learning Alliance structure itself]

I asked the farmers I was interviewing, who are members of the management of the Farmer Organization and attend the LA meetings, how knowledge from the LA is shared with other farmers. They responded that they have a monthly meeting at the Farmer Organisation and at this meeting they share what they have learnt at the LA meetings or activities.

I asked the farmers if there was anything that could be done better or to improve the process of the Learning Alliance. They answered, *“we need now even more opportunities to express our own issues in this forum”*.

The farmers told me that this was the first time that they have worked with a research project. When I asked them then what their expectations of the Learning Alliance were- they answered *“immediate actions!!”*. I explained that often with research it is about gaining greater understanding of an issue and exploring possible solutions first -which takes time-and perhaps actions may not be immediate. The farmers then said that *“we were happy to be involved in the research process since we could see that it would lead to action through the Learning Alliance. For example-the garbage trap- was the end result of a whole process of identifying the problem, figuring out a solution and then doing the actual implementation of the garbage trap to address the issue with solid waste coming into our fields.”*



Credit: IWMI WASPA



Credit: IWMI WASPA