Summary

A learning alliance (LA) consists of multi-stakeholder learning platforms at different institutional levels. A learning alliance facilitates the development and testing of innovative approaches to address complex problems such the use of waste water in agriculture, and capacity building for scaling up. A number of key steps need to be taken to set up a learning alliance: (a) stakeholder analysis, (b) stakeholder involvement and (c) process monitoring. Guidance notes 2-4 deal with these issues.

Introduction

Why	The learning alliance forms a key methodological component to the WASPA project approach, as it provides the framework in which stakeholders are brought together to jointly develop solutions to WASPA related problems and to scale up results.
For who is the note meant?	This note is meant for local team leaders who are responsible for giving shape and guiding the entire learning alliance process, as well as for training field staff. It might be necessary to translate (part of) the included tools in the local language.
What does this note describe?	This note provides an introduction to the key concepts of LAs and an overview of the phases in the LA process. Subsequent guidance notes provide more detailed guidance on the steps.

Learning alliances: why and what?

The purpose of a Learning Alliance is to:

- Develop solutions to WASPA related issues by bringing together the knowledge and perspectives of different stakeholders
- Build capacity amongst relevant stakeholders for scaling up.

A learning alliance is not a silver bullet but it builds upon a number of proven methodologies, such as stakeholder analysis and mobilisation, action research, process monitoring and dissemination and sharing. These are applied in a flexible way according to local needs and the contexts. The learning alliance process requires facilitation to ensure stakeholders are brought on board and to overcome conflicts or other difficulties common to any partnership approach, such as domination by powerful stakeholders. The following section describes the key concepts in the learning alliance process.
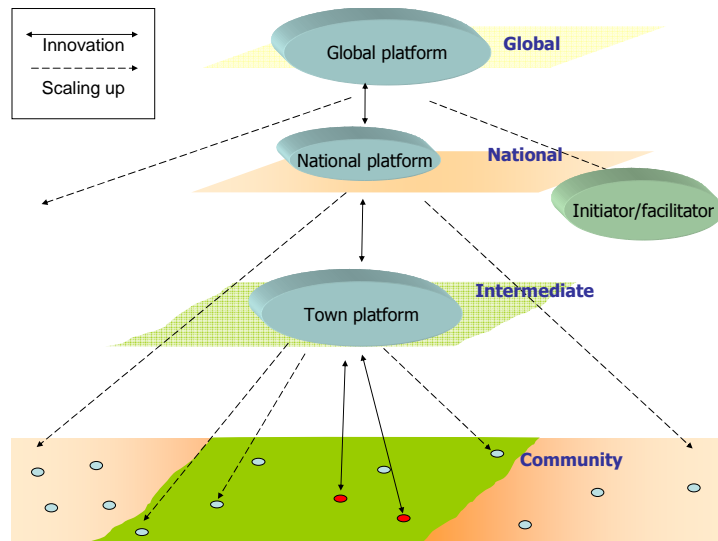
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Key elements in the Learning Alliance

Figure 1: Learning alliance

Key elements in the Learning Alliance are:

- **Levels.** A learning alliance (LA) consists of learning platforms (LPs) at different institutional levels. In the case of WASPA these are town, national and global level. This note only refers to activities required at town and national level. Working to involve stakeholders at different levels is crucial in order to take innovations to scale.
- **Stakeholder platforms.** Each LP will bring together multiple stakeholders. Stakeholders are those who have an interest or reason (stake) to be involved in WASPA. They are not necessarily like-minded, but rather have complementary capabilities in the fields of implementation, regulation, policy, research and learning, and documentation and dissemination. The term 'platform' is used to convey the concept of a 'level playing field' where all members can communicate as equals. It will require time to get such stage.
- **Innovation and scaling up.** Stakeholders come together to jointly develop solutions to problems perceived by the LP members. These are expected to be innovative answers, addressing WASPA issues from different angles. It is also expected that the LP members will take the results further within their own mandate to address similar problems elsewhere. This is what we mean by scaling up.
- **Horizontal and vertical communication.** In order to develop innovations and scale them up, stakeholders need to work together and to communicate their views. Horizontal communication refers to communication between stakeholders within the LP at a certain level (e.g. town). This is of particular importance in the field of WASPA which typically covers a range of sectors that often do not coordinate their work. Vertical communication refers to communication between the platforms at different levels. This communication is important for establishing legitimacy and commitment from higher level institutions to implement innovations developed at lower level. It can also enhance ownership and uptake at higher levels for scaling up activities or approaches developed in WASPA.

How?

In order to have a learning alliance in place, all these points need to be addressed. However, that is a difficult task. Not all stakeholders may be happy to start sharing information or sit around the table with others. An open-ended learning process may not result in clear outcomes. A clear methodological approach is needed with strong process facilitation. The activities described below are not a linear process, some iteration between them will be necessary.

The project approach is summarised in figure 2. Central to WASPA are the linkages between sanitation, wastewater and its use. These form the subject of study and planning for improvement. The second layer is the process of participatory action planning carried out to address the linkages: they are assessed; a vision for their future state is defined; and strategies and plans are developed and implemented to improve them. A third layer is then formed by the Learning Alliance process of stakeholder involvement, which is structured around the planning cycle. The fourth layer is the documentation of the process. Not visible in the diagram are activities related to the facilitation and management of this process.
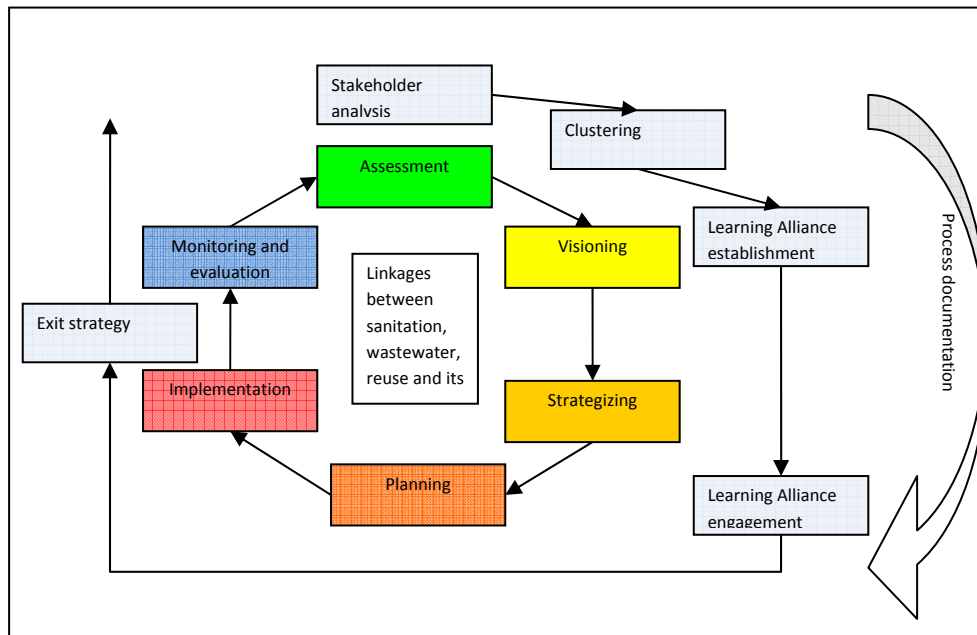

Figure 2: Relation between the main project elements

The guidance notes

This guidance note outlines the concept of Learning Alliances. Subsequent guidance notes deal with the following elements of the process of stakeholder involvement.

1. **Stakeholder analysis**

A first activity is analysing which are the persons and organisations with an interest or a stake in WASPA related issues. Also, we need to look into what their perception is of that issue is, and how they relate to other stakeholders. More information on Stakeholder analysis can be found in **Guidance Note 2.**

Stakeholder involvement in Participatory Action Planning

Once stakeholders, their perceptions and relations are identified, they need to be actively involved in analysing the problem and developing solutions. In order to do so, they may first need to be brought together in clusters around sub-topics. After that, all stakeholders may come together to discuss linkages between sub-topics. Stakeholder involvement needs to be structured. We use a participatory action planning cycle for that. This is elaborated in **Guidance Note 3,** which describes how to organise feedback from assessments and stakeholder involvement in participatory action planning.

Once the platform is established, it will need to carry out activities such as participatory assessment and planning, action research and capacity building.

2. Process monitoring

As the learning alliances will aim to change understanding, attitudes and practices of stakeholders with respect to WASPA, it is important to monitor those change processes as well as the monitoring of implementation of agreed actions. In **Guidance Note 4** more information is given on the methodology and focus of process monitoring of the learning alliances.

Further references

Moriarty, P., Fonseca, C., Smits, S. and T. Schouten (2005) *Background paper for the Symposium on Learning Alliances for scaling up innovative approaches in the water and sanitation sector*. IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, Delft, the Netherlands.
http://www.irc.nl/content/download/16138/208040/file/Background_paper_symposium_.pdf

Smits, S.; Moriarty, P.; and Sijbesma, C. (eds) 2007. *Learning Alliances: scaling up innovations in water, sanitation and hygiene*. Technical paper series; no. 47. Delft, The Netherlands, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre. http://www.irc.nl/la