Learning Alliances in WASHTech

Deliverable D6.1 / D4
(This document replaces Guidelines for training learning alliance facilitators)

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Abbreviations

2iE	*Institut International d'Ingénierie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement* (international water and environment engineering institute)
ATC	Appropriate Technology Centre (in Uganda)
CLARA	Capacity-Linked water and sanitation for Africa's peri-urban and Rural Areas
DoW	Description of Work
INRA	Institut National de Recherche Agronomique
KAP	Knowledge attitude and practice (a survey used to establish WASHTech's baseline against the embedding of the TAF)
LA	Learning alliance
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NLLAP	National Level Learning Alliance Platform (Ghana)
PN-AEPA	*Programme National pour l'Approvisionnement en Eau Potable et Assainissement* (National WASH strategy in Burkina Faso)
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
TAF	Technology Assessment Framework
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (sector)

Executive summary

This document describes the theoretical underpinnings of the learning alliance approach and provides a framework for assessing the actual progress and challenges in implementing this approach in WASHTech. It is intended as a working document that will be periodically updated. A checklist for reviewing progress and gathering evidence is provided at the end of the document.

This document replaces the Guidelines for training learning alliance facilitators as the country teams concluded that they have sufficient experience from previous work. Instead a framework to support reflection and documentation of the learning alliance process in the focus countries was deemed more useful. This framework consists of five elements that cover key elements of any learning alliance process: essence, arborescence (or rooting), presence, resilience and evidence of the alliance.

The learning alliances in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Uganda build on existing platforms, groups and learning events at national and decentralised levels. In 2011, alliance activities such as scoping studies and meetings were initiated. At this stage of the project it is too early to speak of evidence and resilience of the alliances. Alliance facilitators in each country have identified opportunities and challenges faced in 2011. Opportunities include several national and international platforms and events which provide space to share WASHTech outputs and engage stakeholders (end 2011 and 2012) and linkages between the host organisations and other sector players. Challenges include the development of (linkages with) active decentralised platforms, getting the right people involved and keeping them on board in a learning process. Linkages with other learning initiatives such as CLARA and with researchers outside WASHTech are important issues in the further embedding of the TAF in the coming year.

Why this document and who is it for?

WASHTech states that it will apply a learning alliance approach. Learning alliances (LAs) are not new but are a fairly complex multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach to carry out action-research and implementation work. The central premise of learning alliances is the embedding of research and implementation work in the local and national policy processes and in the practices of key sector stakeholders.

This document provides an overview of the concept of learning alliances in the WASHTech project, explains how a learning alliance is supposed to work and what it aims to improve. It also provides insights into the practical choices and implications for learning alliance processes in the three project countries and at the international level.

This document replaces the official deliverable D6.1 / D4 (Guidelines for training LA facilitators). After consultation with all country team coordinators, it was concluded that guidelines were not necessary, but instead sound documentation of the theory and practice of applying a learning alliance approach in the project would be useful.

This is a working document that should help all learning alliance facilitators (the WASHTech national coordinators) and WASHTech consortium members 1) understand the vision of change that learning alliances promote and 2) provide a framework for them to reflect on their practice and decisions regarding the facilitation of the learning alliance process and its development within and beyond the project's lifetime.

Learning Alliances, the theory

What the model entails in theory

Learning alliances first appeared in the agricultural sector but were adapted and brought to the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector from 2006 on, particularly through the EMPOWERS project. The relative success of the EMPOWERS approach of learning alliances in mobilising many sector actors and bringing about change in policy and practice has encouraged IRC and various partners to adopt a learning alliance approach in a number of subsequent projects: SWITCH, RiPPLE, WASPA Asia, WASHCost, Triple-S and now WASHTech.

The theoretical model for the learning alliance approach was crystallised in the publication 'Learning alliances - Scaling up innovations in water, sanitation and hygiene' by Smits *et al.* (2007), which described the essential traits of a learning alliance. From this publication WASHTech borrowed its understanding of a learning alliance. The Description of Work (DoW) of WASHTech[1] depicts the learning alliance approach with the following elements:

- **Multiple institutional levels** – developing innovations for the WASH sector requires knowledge from different institutional levels (community, intermediate, national) to be brought together - only this combination can bring about lasting change.
- **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 and achieving their integration in existing policies and practices requires contributions from these multiple disciplines.
- **Facilitated platforms** – multiple stakeholders at different levels do not come together to innovate and scale up spontaneously. A facilitated space for innovation is required, where they are invited and can discuss, negotiate, have conflicts, learn and work out solutions together.

What the official WASHTech documents say

Learning alliances feature highly in the official WASHTech documents. The DoW mentions the central role of learning alliances at a number of junctions. Box 1 below summarises the broad rationale behind the learning alliance approach.

> *The overall goal of the Learning Alliance approach is the participatory implementation of the project in order to improve upon local WASH governance in the country. The main aims are:*
> - *to involve key sector actors in the project activities*
> - *to achieve acceptable embedding of the project results in WASH Sector*
> - *to ensure sustainable dissemination of the project results.*
>
> WASHTech Description of Work, p. 15

Box 1 Key aims of the learning alliance

The DoW further lists a number of objectives:
- Ensuring "*ownership and adoption of the Technology Assessment Framework (TAF) and its conclusions, the choice of technologies to be assessed by the TAF*".
- Steering the research and getting involved in "*adjusting approaches according the findings and adopting the technologies found to have the most potential*".

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[1] WASHTech, 2010.*Description of Work*, figure 15, p. 16, (WASHTech internal documents 266200-28/10/ 2010)

- Providing "*a platform in which passive resistance can be identified, discussed and addressed*".
- And crucially, facilitating the "*actual use of the TAF by governments and other sector stakeholders*".

The DoW also mentions complementarities with the Triple-S and WASHCost projects in terms of using the same research sites and because those two projects also make use of a learning alliance to *"embed innovation into the sector".* Next to the functions highlighted above, the DoW therefore anticipated additional benefits from introducing this approach: sharing combined lessons across the three projects, thereby benefitting "*to each project and to the national sector as a whole*".

Finally, the DoW also expected that "*through the learning alliances [...] Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) at both sub-national and national level will be involved.*"

The WASHTech approach follows the classical set up of learning alliances in other projects:
"*The Learning Alliance for WASHTECH will have interconnected **multi-stakeholder platforms** at the national level and at the de-centralised level where the actual introduction and uptake of technologies takes place*". "*It comprises **multiple actors** from central governmental departments, local government actors, WASH donors representative, research institutions, NGO's platform*".

The national level platform of the Learning Alliance is usually one working group of an existing sector coordination platform, led by the focal ministry for the sector. "*Good facilitation of the learning alliances will be a critical element in their success*".

The requirements of a successful learning alliance process are also specified in the DoW:
"*The short cycles of action and reflection that will be necessary to keep the project on track and moving forward are heavily reliant on good quality information being available to project staff and Learning Alliance members as and when it is needed*".

Among the risks mentioned, one relates to the fact that "*The existing LAs of WASHCost and Triple-S find it difficult to accommodate/prioritise sufficiently the agenda of WASHTECH*". On this point, the DoW insists that the "*WASHCost and Triple-S LAs are the mechanisms for developing the TAF but even more so for achieving joint implementation and national uptake of the TAF, including institutional embedding*".

A framework to understand and analyse learning alliances

It seems relevant to use a framework for two different reasons: A) it helps break down the theoretical concepts into a more manageable set of factors and dimensions that require attention to when facilitating the establishment and development of a learning alliance. B) It allows a comparison between the countries. Comparing country processes is not meant to distribute rewards and blames but rather to help understand the dynamics at play and the merits of certain choices, regarding the key aspects of a learning alliance process. This also allows a better cross-fertilisation and exchange of ideas and tips between LA facilitators.

The suggested framework builds upon previous documentation about learning alliance processes (Le Borgne 2010; Smits et al. 2007; Verhagen, Butterworth and Morris 2008; Butterworth, McIntyre and Da Silva Wells 2011), but it has been developed specifically for WASHTech to clarify the implementation of learning alliances and to revisit the theoretical model behind learning alliances in the light of recent experiences.

The framework incorporates the following elements:
- The **essence** of the alliance: rationale, aspirations, expectations and the principles guiding the learning alliance, as well as the history that precedes the set-up of the learning alliance;
- The **arborescence** (or rooting) of the alliance: the formal and informal structure of the learning alliance at different levels, the groups and individuals involved in it and their relations with other existing platforms, networks, organisations and policies;
- The **presence** of the alliance: inputs, activities – particularly interactions within and outside the learning alliance – and its outputs;
- The **resilience** of the alliance: self-organisation and further development, including the progressive empowerment of alliance members to take the learning alliance to another level, the alignment with national policies, strategies and priorities (favouring its long term survival);
- The **evidence** of the alliance: all proof of change brought about by the learning alliance, various outcomes and ultimately the impact achieved through the alliance.

Figure 1 The framework comes together in the following scheme
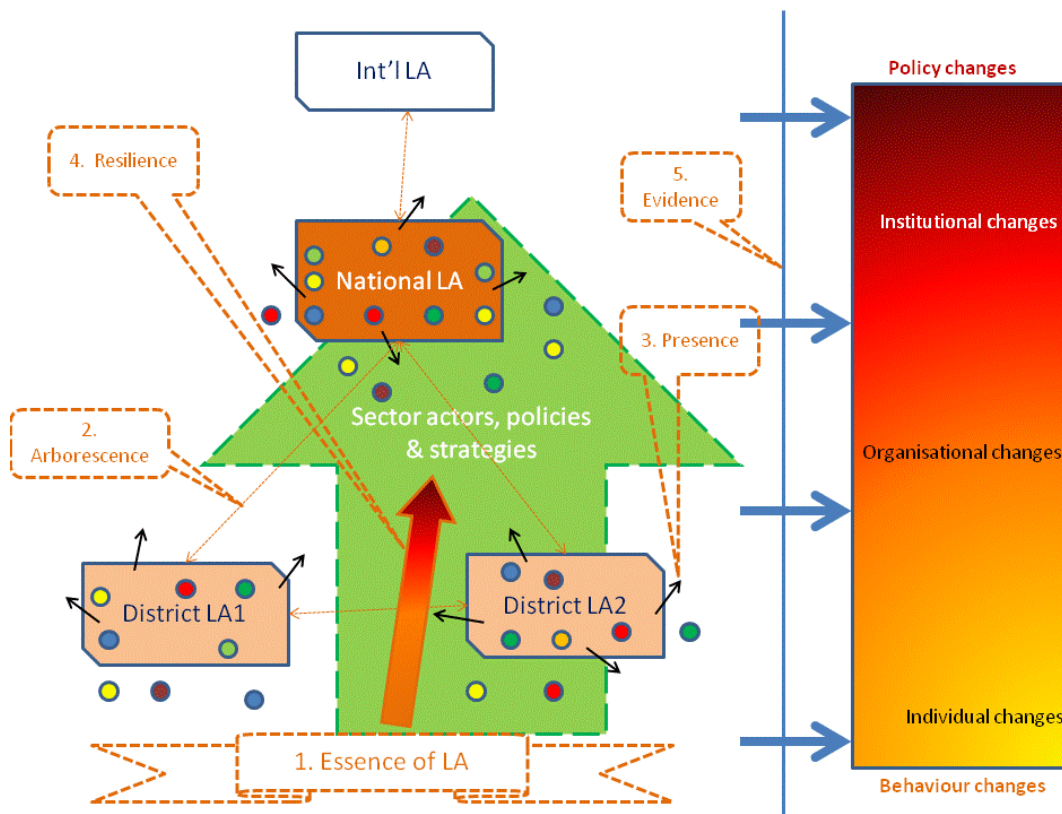
It is also explained in this animated slide: http://www.slideshare.net/ewenlb/animated-la-structure

It is through the lens of this framework that this document proposes to assess the specific country processes in the countries where WASHTech is taking place.

The essence of a learning alliance

Keywords: IDEALS, rationale, aspirations, expectations, guiding principles, history
A learning alliance responds to certain ideals and a specific rationale that explains why it was adopted as an approach. In addition, the *owners* of an initiative or a project (that is the people who have designed it), as well as the implementers of that initiative/project, all have a specific stake in the process, that is specific aspirations and expectations.

The coordinator or facilitator of a learning alliance, or perhaps the team supporting him/her, may also apply certain principles that steer the learning alliance in a certain direction and give it a specific ethics. Finally, the learning alliance may also be the fruit of a certain history, the pre-existence of other LA processes in the past or networks that made the learning alliance possible.

All these elements are important as they define the ideals of a learning alliance process. It is those ideals that this part of the framework addresses.

The arborescence of a learning alliance

Key words: ROOTING, structure, formality, integration, membership, participation, incentives, affiliation
The learning alliance is not only an approach and a philosophy, it is also a series of connected platforms that are located at various levels from community to international arenas. Each of these platforms comprises specific members (both institutions and individuals) and it might form a network in its own right and may be recognised formally or not – even registered or not. It may be created anew or just be incorporated in an existing working group or platform. In addition, at each level, the learning alliance might comprise several specific sub-groups that could play different roles e.g. a steering group, a full assembly, a research team, a secretariat. In each of these groups, there may be a very active dynamic with very motivated members or perhaps that is a challenge and specific incentives are required to make the learning alliance work. Finally, at each level there might be formal or informal linkages with other organisations, networks or policy frameworks - that is the affiliation of the learning alliance.

All these choices may have implications as to how the learning alliance organises its work and how the embedding process is organised. This part of the framework is thus concerned with the rooting of the learning alliance network and the implications that its structure and membership have on its functioning and embedding.

The presence of a learning alliance

Key words: ACTIVITIES, Inputs, resources, interactions, outputs, visibility.
A learning alliance comes to life through resources that lead to its establishment, the activities that lead to its set up and to its development – as according to the rationale of the initiative – all the way to the delivery of specific products and services. Crucially, it lives through many interactions: regular LA meetings, special events, bilateral contacts between learning alliance members, communication with the outside world and dissemination of the outputs).

This part of the framework is thus concerned with the activities of the learning alliance to go beyond being a 'talkshop' and the visibility of the LA.

The resilience of a learning alliance

Key words: EMBEDDING, ownership, scaling up, commitment, continuity, sustainability alignment.

As development never unfolds in a straightforward way, a learning alliance may also follow a life of its own, beyond the intentions that guided its establishment. As learning alliance members see the value of the cooperation and coordination unfolding through the learning alliance, the survival of the latter beyond the initiative that saw to its establishment might become an important issue. The resilience of the learning alliance comes in the picture then. If LA members and benefactors decide that there is much to gain from a learning alliance, they might get further involved and commit in kind and cash, institutionally as well as individually, in talks and actions. This is also potentially backed with internal institutional mechanisms to ensure knowledge-sharing within the member institution – as there are often turnover issues in learning alliance processes, hampering the continuity and resilience of the alliance. A learning alliance does not have to be resilient, but if its actors ask for it, it seems to suggest that there is an element in it that is crucial to the sector and aligns very well with national policies, strategies and priorities.

This aspect of the framework deals with the growth of the learning alliance beyond its original mandate – perhaps to a much wider agenda or perhaps scaling up to other areas and levels – and with the path that it seems to be taking for the future. The question of resources (and committed facilitation beyond project funding) is crucial here.

The evidence about a learning alliance

Key words: IMPACT, accountability, proof, indicators, success, challenges, (policy/behaviour) change.

The learning alliance follows a multiple-accountability system: It is accountable to its own members, it is accountable to the donors that funded the initiative through which it happened and it might be accountable to a much wider group of stakeholders if the learning alliance becomes resilient beyond that initiative and shapes up. It is thus very important to assess (and, as and when relevant, to measure) the evidence of change that the learning alliance seems to have brought, be it in terms of shifting policy processes, behaviour changes, institutional changes or other evidence of change. In the longer run, this relates to the relative impact achieved by the LA.

This part of the framework deals with the concrete or tentative evidence that such a learning alliance approach brings higher benefits than more conventional approaches to (action) research, implementation and policy engagement and how its success is qualified (and crucially, by who?).The monitoring and evaluation processes used to source that evidence are addressed in the penultimate section of this document.

In the next section, featuring the specific process followed by each WASHTech country team, each aspect of the framework is introduced and examined one by one. Some opportunities and expected challenges are also highlighted, as food for thought for the next phase.

Learning alliances, the practice

The LA framework suggested in the previous section was not introduced in the DoW nor at the onset of the WASHTech project. It is meant as a guiding document or an informal benchmarking tool, but not as a formal tool to assess standards and judge the three in-country processes. The following section should therefore be seen as a reflection on the choices made in each learning alliance process, to stimulate conscious learning and cross- fertilization between the teams.

Burkina Faso

1.   Essence

The Burkina Faso learning alliance does not have a rationale that differs from the project rationale. However, Amah Klutse mentioned in the extra consortium meeting from October 2011 that "Learning alliances help people understand what the different projects entail" and facilitates cross-learning and sharing. LA also prepares the different sector actors to champion the findings of the projects towards the end. The success of learning alliances is dependent on the contributions of all stakeholders in the implementation (methodology development, research, data analysis, etc).

2.   Arborescence

No new and separate structure was set up to accommodate the WASHTech learning alliance. Instead, the country team looked at existing platforms and groupings. A few seemed well-placed to help with the embedding process in Burkina:

- The learning alliance group that was mobilised during the WASHCost project;
- The resource centre network – meeting irregularly; the Resource Centre Network (RCN) has already be contacted for the presentation of the project to its members during a meeting on January 2012.
- The national Committee for the steering and monitoring of the national water and sanitation strategy (PN/AEPA) [2]. This group is meeting twice a year.
- While discussions are now going on to see which platform can be appropriately used as WASHTech learning alliance,
- The country team is very likely to use each or all of the above platforms depending on the specific need. RCN, PNAEPA and CCEPA come on top though. It should be noted that the geographical coverage and the extent of WSA (former CREPA) covers many African countries including the above mentioned platforms.

In Burkina Faso there is a plan to have a presence at local level and to involve local stakeholders but this is as yet unclear. For **district level** (in Burkina Faso, municipalities replace districts), the Burkina Faso team aims at linking up with the regional and communal platforms related to the PN-AEPA.

In order to gather strong **membership**, the country and LA coordinator maintains regular contact with the Heads of the Directorates for water resources and for sanitation. He has also made efforts to keep other members informed at all times. Among the key actors are of course the Directorates for water resources and sanitation but the country team is currently considering to target the Ministry of Finance as well. Among academic institutes, the learning alliance group also involves representatives from INRA (Institut National de Recherche Agronomique), from 2iE (engineering institute). Among private sector actors, the alliance also includes representatives from '*bureaux d'étude*' (consultancy firms).

In terms of **affiliation**, the Description of Work (DoW) clearly mentioned that "*The Learning Alliance in Burkina Faso will also invite the CLARA project to discuss design of the pilot and outcomes with their platform and engage itself with possible uptake and adaptation in the Burkina Faso context.*" CLARA,

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[2] That strategy is the 'Programme National pour l'Approvisionnement en Eau Potable et Assainissement' or PN-AEPA.

and the more recent WaterBioTech project led by CREPA constitute crucial ventures to link up with both to share knowledge and develop policy engagement.

3.   Presence

Since the beginning of the project, the following activities have taken place:

- Meeting with sector actors (INERA, DGRE, DGAEUE, 2iE, WaterAid, ONEA, IGEDD, Eau Vive, GIZ etc. in July 2011 to present the result of the KAP baseline study and to investigate the role played by sector actors in introducing and promoting new technologies. During that same meeting participants also discussed the draft TAF and the country situation analysis.
- The implementation partners of the project in Burkina Faso have initiated a meeting to finalise the picture of change and develop the Most Significant Change (MSC) documentation plan. The results of this meeting are to be presented to the LA in early 2012.
- The project team took the opportunity of the high level forum organised by CREPA (renamed WSA: Water and Sanitation for Africa) held December 5-8, 2011 in Ouagadougou. The project has also been highlighted in line with research being conducted by CREPA/ WSA.

Figure 2 Picture of change made by WashTech Burkina
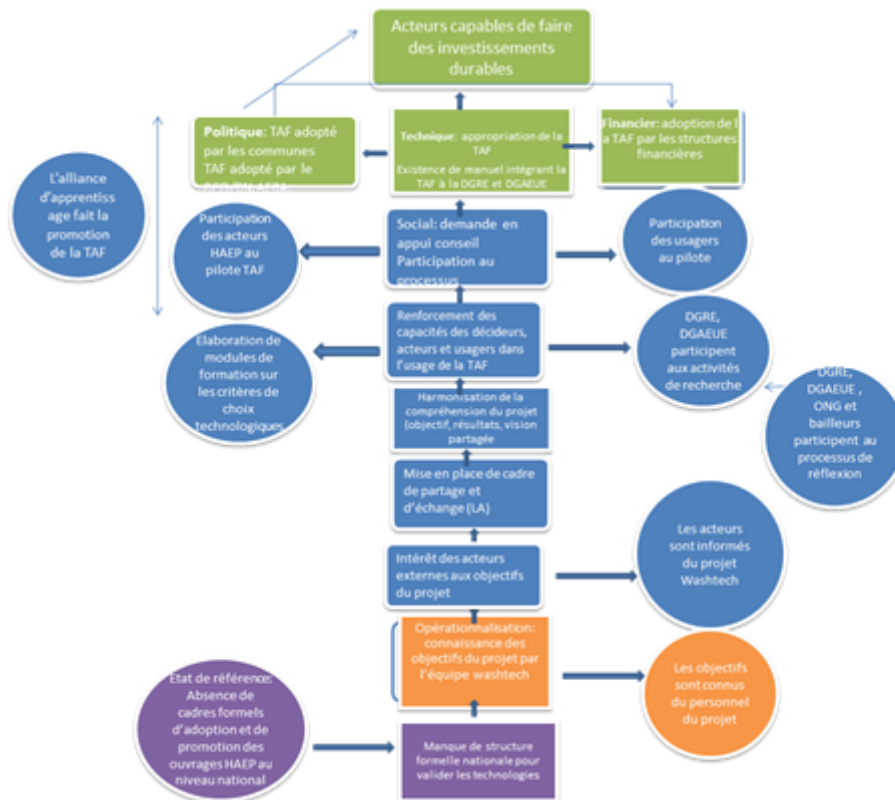
4.   Resilience

One of the factors that reinforces resilience is the continuity of representation at the alliance and the embedding of the initiative inside each member institution by various means. One of these means is the internal reporting / sharing of information from the representatives in the LA. In Burkina Faso there seems to be [3]a double feedback mechanism: Member institutions report some of their activities during LA meetings and in parallel, their representatives are expected to report within their own institution.

Another interesting positive factor for the resilience of the learning alliance in Burkina Faso is the fact that CREPA is a regional centre and its mandate is currently expanding to the rest of Africa. It is thus

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[3] As Amah Klutse informed consortium members during the October 2011 consortium meeting (WASHTech internal document).

well placed to take ownership and perhaps even take over the process at the end of the WASHTech initiative. According to Amah Klutse, "CREPA will be the main user of the TAF".

5. Evidence

It is as yet unclear whether the learning alliance in Burkina Faso has indeed achieved any significant result.

Challenges

The LA in Burkina Faso has successfully completed the scoping study under the leadership of CREPA. The details of the LA members' contributions can be read in the report.

In the extra consortium meeting in October, the alliance coordinator highlighted a number of challenges that the country team have already faced:

- The consistent participation of representatives remains a challenge. High level, influential actors are very busy and cannot always free their agenda to participate to the meetings. However this results in sending another representative who may not be sufficiently aware of the progress and process at hand – and who may even slow down that process in order to catch up with other meeting participants.
- Good planning is also essential for the meetings. No learning alliance meeting should be planned unless there is a concrete piece of work to discuss and assess. Novelty plays a role in ensuring buy-in from the stakeholders it seems.

In addition, a number of questions remain regarding the embedding process in Burkina Faso:

- To what extent does the WASHTech embedding process benefit from using the WASHCost learning alliance (with a different emphasis), since its members may not be best placed to engage on issues of technology assessment.
- What is exactly planned for local level engagement is also slightly ill-defined at this stage. In other words, at municipal level, what exactly are the plans and how can the WASHTech research and embedding agenda be integrated in the local governmental agencies' plans?

Opportunities

With the finalisation of a number of key project documents from the third quarter of 2011, the learning alliance in Burkina Faso will have great opportunities to influence policy-making and institutional behaviours.

The national forum for innovation and technology takes place every two years and it will be an important platform for the embedding of WASHTech in Burkina Faso.

Decentralisation provides space for interaction with local and district authorities for the participation in the research and the subsequent embedding of the findings. It should be noted that the extension of WSA (formerly CREPA) is also an opportunity to reach most African countries. A national forum is also being held in preparation of the WWF-6. The country team is exploring the possibility to make it an opportunity to present the project and contribute to outreach.

Ghana

1. Essence

The Ghana learning alliance does not have a rationale that differs from the project rationale. However the national platform (see section 2 below) goes beyond the WASHTech project as a platform for all other projects and initiatives using a learning alliance approach.

2. Arborescence

The WASHTech LA relies on a pre-existing platform, the National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP) which convenes on a monthly basis and invites thematic presentations and discussions. The NLLAP is sufficiently well-oiled since 2010 that for any new project happening in the WASH sector, it guides the project team in establishing a dedicated group of stakeholders that have an interest and/or stake in the agenda of the new initiative.

A first start-up meeting in March 2011 kicked off the collaborative work. But the key moment for the WASHTech Ghana working group was in May 2011, when the country study (D2.2) and the Knowledge/Attitude/Practice (KAP) survey for the stakeholder baseline (D7.1) offered great opportunities to get the group together during the NLLAP and organise the composition of the core country team in charge of guiding WASHTech work in Ghana. The **core country team meets on a quarterly basis**, though extraordinary meetings may be organised if the occasion calls for it (e.g. when a research output has to be discussed).

Figure 3 Intertwining of different platforms
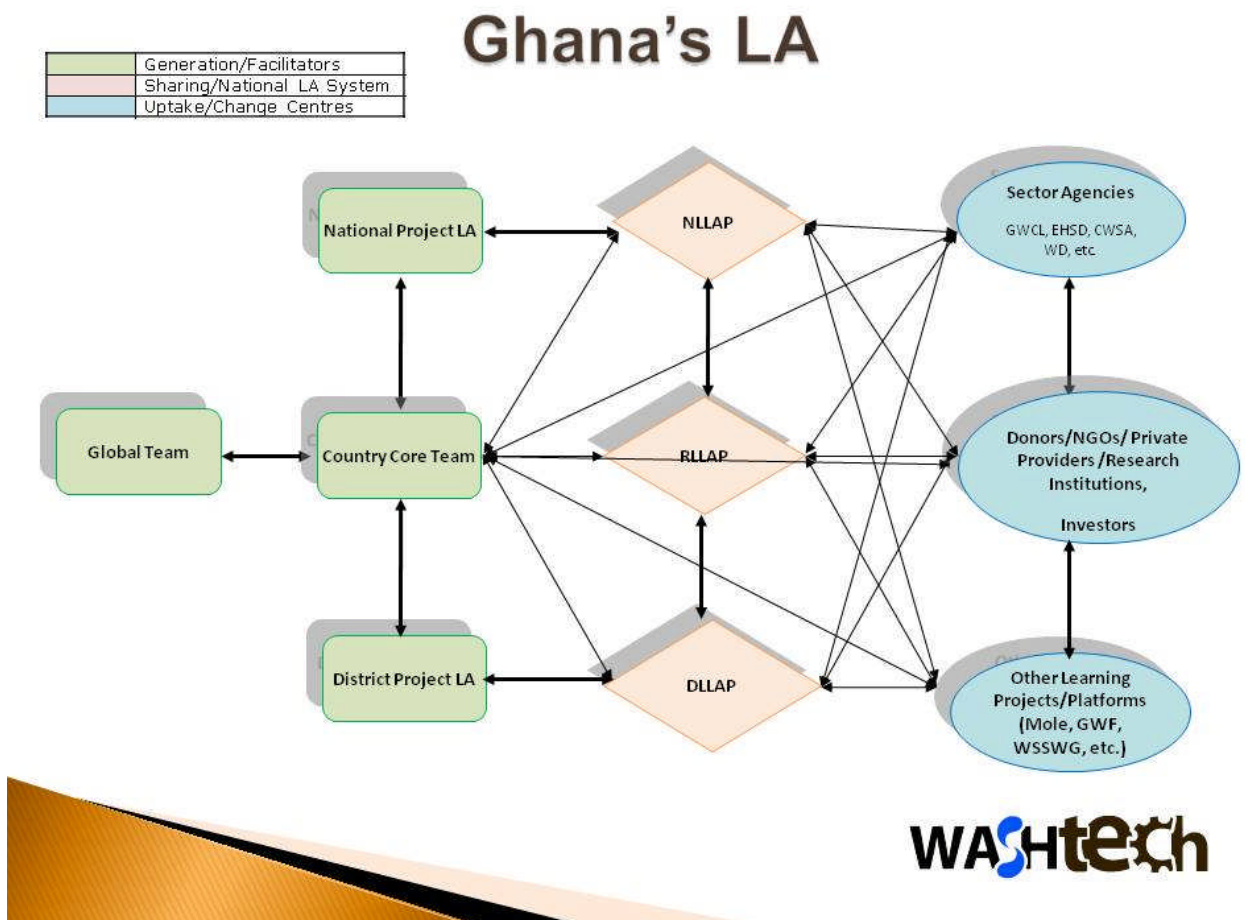
In terms of **membership**, the WASHTech working group involves representatives from public agencies, private sector and civil society.[4] In order to ensure their active participation, the LA coordinator and country coordinator, Abu Wumbei and Benedict Tuffuor respectively, contacted various organisations to sound out their interest to be part of the learning alliance and met with heads of various institutions ahead of the kick-off meeting to find out who would take part to it. They targeted senior / high level officials that have decision making power within their organisation. Since WASHTech is a research project that aims at changing behaviours in the long run, universities play a specific role. On that front, the Ghana team comprises KNUST as a core partner and the national level learning alliance also comprises two private consultants.

Next to the NLLAP, the WASHTech embedding process is expected to also strongly rely on **district LA platforms**. This process has not started yet. The Ghana team benefits from experience in other projects (e.g. TPP, Triple-S) where it has already set up district level learning alliances. The process they are likely to follow is to scan for existing groups and projects in the area to link up with in the research, and to use other (less relevant or interested) groups to disseminate findings. Synergies with projects such as Triple-S are expected. For the embedding process, the national platform will be the platform of choice.

3. Presence

The project core team (working group) meets every quarter and also as and when the need arise. This team has met about four times in 2011 and still one more to go before the end of the year. The project has also shared with stakeholders (government, CSOs, Donor Group and the private sector at various sector learning events like Mole 2011 and Third Ghana Water Forum. The team proposed to formally launch the project in November but had to postpone it to beginning of next year to suit the sector calendar.

4. Resilience

It is too early to mention anything about resilience at this stage.

5. Evidence

In Ghana, there is not much evidence of success or progress at this stage, other than having a group of stakeholders motivated by the agenda around technology assessment.

Challenges

The main challenges for the Ghana country team relate to:
- Getting the right people at the meeting: The availability of key decision-makers, people that can influence decisions.
- In order to ensure this, another challenge is the time spent on consulting with various stakeholders and ensuring their participation;
- Particularly at the stage of the assessment pilot, it will be crucial to have all key sector players take involved. Proactive planning should help address this issue.
- In Ghana, since there is the NLLAP, there is a bit of competition to place an item on the discussion agenda.
- Finally, in Ghana as elsewhere, a general challenge remains to push learning at the forefront, rather than encourage simple discussions.

Opportunities

As for the point of competing on the NLLAP agenda, TREND is well-placed to influence (to some extent) the agenda and ensure that WASHTech-related discussions are effectively tabled. Another opportunity is to organise the regional level learning alliance platforms in the Northern, Volta and Brong Ahafo regions.

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[4] The WASHTech working group comprises representatives from the Ministry of Water Resource, Works and Housing ; Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Agencies such as the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) Academic and research institutions, like KNUST, the NGO umbrella (CONIWAS) etc.

Uganda

1.   Essence

There does not seem to be any more specific rationale presiding over the Uganda learning alliance, when compared with the project rationale. The rationale guiding the learning alliance in Uganda adopts the aspirations, expectations from project (LA rationale). The action research nature of the project calls for embedding the process (principals, concepts) into sector to influence policy and practice. The success of embedding the project concepts hedges on an effectively facilitated process and sharing with the wider sector players thus a learning alliance methodology. Sector working groups and learning platforms' representatives were engaged in setting up of the LA. It is hoped that effective facilitation of LA processes will firmly embed the TAF concepts in the WASH sector.

2.   Arborescence

The Uganda learning alliance is a loose alliance based on interest. It builds on existing learning groups and platforms. As Brenda Achiro mentioned in the Consortium meeting in October 2011 [5], the country team chose not to set up a separate learning alliance, but rather to invest in existing **thematic working groups**, that have been set up by either the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) or the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET), and are part of annual learning events. Representatives from the various existing groups have been invited to take part in a **Core Team**. This Core Team, which comprises members from the line ministries (Ministry of Water and Environment, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Sport), the national NGO umbrella UWASNET, Makerere University and the private sector, started meeting in August 2011. The core team provides technical input (rather than playing an advisory role) and ensures the liaison between the project and the various groups that the team members are representing.

The LA platform is structured in **three levels** i.e. district, and regional and national learning levels. The learning process will be structured around the district based learning forums, regional learning forums, annual inter-district sessions, Appropriate Technology Centre dissemination workshops, National learning forums, annual joint sector review and the Joint technical review meetings. The lower learning levels set the learning agenda at the higher level, thereby feeding in the discussions at the national level.

The national level Core Team constitutes about 12 members, from 10 institutions and private sector agencies. The members represent the National Sanitation Working Group, functional working group, the donor working group, the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network, universities and academia and the private sector. The selection of institutions was aimed at ensuring maximum representation of all WASH stakeholders. The continuous participation of the LA members will be monitored especially to capture their contribution to content, on an annual basis. The members of the LA were selected on an interest basis; their acceptance affirms their motivation to serve as a Core Team. Membership is annually confirmed to allow for renewal.

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[5] See WASTech, 2011. *Consortium meeting report* (WASHTech internal documents, October 2011)

Figure 4 The structure of the alliance in Uganda
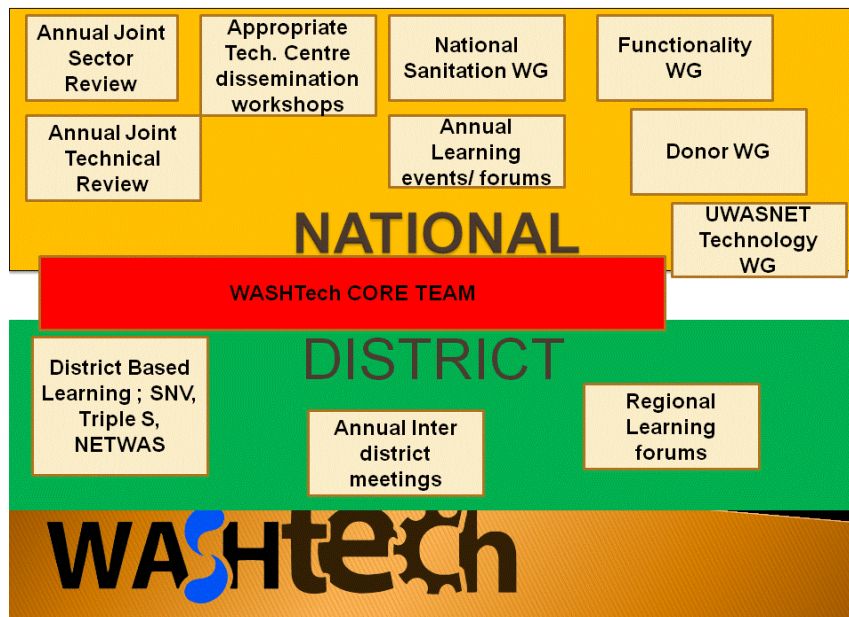
The Uganda learning alliance is **affiliated with** learning events at national and regional level. The LA coordinator identified agencies at district level that have planned to set up similar platforms (e.g. Triple-S, SNV projects in certain districts) and the idea is to plan the work with them. There is furthermore an inter-district coordination mechanism which should support the embedding process.

Membership-wise, the Uganda team has taken a slightly different approach. They mapped key actors at national and local level and started targeting specific individuals from the relevant ministries (water, health), universities, community development circles, representatives of sub-counties and private sector companies to become members of the core group. The idea is that key individuals that can take executive decisions should be involved with respect to their understanding, involvement or influence in the specific WASHTech agenda.

Another key linkage is with the Appropriate Technology Centre (ATC) which is the main body involved in reviewing technologies in Uganda. That centre is also closely affiliated with NETWAS Uganda, placing the latter in a good position for the embedding of the TAF in the country.

## 3.	Presence

The core team meets every quarter. The first of these meetings took place in August 2011. The LA members play an advisory role to the country team but also contribute input to the content, the core team contributed to the final design and content of the country leaflet and contributed to the selection of technologies for TAF testing. The LA will contribute to the design and finalization of the project out puts. With the current structure, the LA is not tagged to develop specific outputs of its own. The LA is organised through meetings, emails, website, and monthly updates. The LA being a loose network based on interest, its visibility at sector level is not highlighted.

## 4.	Resilience

It is too early to mention anything about resilience at this stage.

## 5.	Evidence

It is early on in the process but some results have been achieved:
- There is interest in the project and in the technical assessment framework already – thanks to their mobilisation through the national platforms;
- Synergies with the appropriate technology centre seems secure, which is important for the embedding of WASHTech in the longer run.

Challenges

Key challenges so far are:

- The various national meetings still do not make enough room for learning – deep, critical reflection and more space to encourage social learning are difficult to ensure; although the space for discussion and presentation is a good first step, it is not enough for WASHTech to embed the TAF in most appropriate way and to stimulate a change of behaviour and perhaps policies;
- The few genuine learning events and platforms are concentrated only in certain regions of the country, they are not present country-wide.
- In Uganda, events seem to keep shifting a lot, which makes the tabling of issues on national agendas difficult and hap-hazard;
- Finally, although that is now secured, the establishment of the core team followed a long and bureaucratic process.
- The LA coordinator also mentioned that sometimes sector working group meetings were not taking place as planned.

Opportunities

For the Uganda team, the main opportunity to seize will be to establish a strong linkage with the ATC and to ensure participation of ATC representatives in the embedding group. Other learning platforms are emerging such Dutch WASH Alliance. Affiliation with learning events at national and regional level and with the inter-district coordination mechanism are all opportunities to support the embedding process.

International platforms

The formal project documents do not refer to any international platform that might play the role of the global learning alliance. However a group of professionals interested in the project and its research could play an increasingly important role in the future.

Typically, global level learning alliances are concerned with specific activities such as:
- Advising on robustness of research and quality of research outputs;
- Further dissemination of outputs and lessons learnt to the wider WASH community;
- Advising on up-scaling pathways and supporting up-scaling in practice (through funding, technical expertise);

In 2011, no role is anticipated for such a platform, but the extra consortium meeting in October 2011 has recognised the importance of this 'community of interest' to advise on the research process and up-scaling agenda in the longer run.

Overall opportunities

In each of the countries, WASHTech has not started a new alliance platform, but rather builds on existing learning initiatives and platforms, and on experienced facilitation teams. This is an opportunity in terms of visibility, possible outreach and facilitation. It can also entails several challenges, as described below.

The host organisations are well placed to engage other sector stakeholders and build on the linkages with other relevant organisations in each country.

The potential of an international 'community of interest' has been acknowledged. Further strategizing on how to engage this community could benefit the research process and up-scaling agenda.

Overall challenges

It remains to be seen how much the embedding process of the TAF will actually benefit from using existing alliances (for example the WASHCost learning alliance), which have a different focus. Their members may not be best placed to engage on issues of technology assessment. Experience in other projects shows that to take the learning alliance forward and avoid it becoming a 'talkshop' its members must be motivated and have sufficient mandate/ organisational backing to follow up. Also, the consistent participation of representatives is important for ensuring continuity of learning and follow up.

It is crucial therefore, to examine the learning alliance membership periodically and develop a strategy for engaging those individuals who can champion the learning alliance and its activities and/ or represent the key stakeholder groups and organisations that WASHTech aims to involve.

In addition, an area of attention is the linkages between decentralised and national learning platforms. This needs to be actively facilitated. Tailored and timely documentation and targeted communication activities can support this.

Monitoring process, progress and impact of learning alliances

Learning alliances can be monitored or evaluated at various levels and from various perspectives. The following would be advisable ways to gather information on the five aspects of the framework:
- **Documenting the rationale** through interviews with the LA facilitator;
- **Documenting arborescence** through attendance/membership lists (listing the meetings and institutions and individuals present), possibly with additional information about specific roles played by each person (e.g. presenting research report, facilitating bits of a meeting etc.);
- **Documenting presence** should happen with the formal reporting: what inputs (money, time) have gone into facilitating the LA, what outputs have been delivered. It is essential here to encourage the LA facilitators to keep track of the contacts they have had with various LA members (interactions between meetings). Learning alliance facilitation should be monitored separately by interviewing LA facilitators or asking specific questions about this aspect when interviewing LA members;
- **Documenting resilience** could be done through interviews (e.g. stakeholder portraits, MSC stories) and through regular updates in this document regarding discussions on the sustainability or the commitment of resources in cash and kind and the institutionalisation of the learning alliance (or parts of it).
- **Documenting evidence** of progress will happen through stakeholder portraits, MSC stories and possibly through tracking references to the TAF in policy documents and implementation manuals of key sector institutions.

Where to find and document all of this evidence?

WASHTech learning alliances will be documented through the following channels:
- Ongoing documentation of learning alliance meetings will provide presentations, minutes and occasionally interviews of learning alliance members to better understand the facts and perspectives about the process - this should be saved on Dropbox and extracted from there to be featured in this document;
- The WASHTech Herald features monthly information about the country learning alliance processes;
- The stakeholder portraits planned as part of process monitoring (WP 7.2) will give additional information about individual perspectives about the project. Since these portraits will undoubtedly include learning alliance members, LAs will be further documented in this way;
- The Most Significant Change monitoring method will be used to assess behaviour and policy changes and should provide very useful information about the learning alliance process in each country and internationally.
- Half-yearly monitoring reports will be the key outlets to report progress with learning alliances. In addition, the leader of process monitoring will see to it that this document is being updated on a regular basis with additional insights for the final section of this document.

References

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Who is involved in WASHTech?

WASHTech is a consortium research project comprising national and international NGOs, academic institutes and training centres in Africa and Europe.

WASHTech in Africa is spearheaded by the following institutions:
In Burkina Faso:
- Centre Régional pour l'Eau Potable et l'Assainissement à faible coût (CREPA), Burkina Faso
- WaterAid Burkina Faso

In Ghana:
- Training, Research and Networking for Development (TREND), Ghana
- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana
- WaterAid Ghana

In Uganda:
- Network for Water and Sanitation (NETWAS), Uganda
- WaterAid Uganda

European partners include:
- IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (The Netherlands)
- Cranfield University (United Kingdom)
- Skat Foundation (Switzerland)
- WaterAid (United Kingdom)

WASHTech is coordinated by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre in The Hague.