



Research-inspired Policy and Practice Learning in Ethiopia and the Nile region

Kampala Colloquium on Nile-Regional Practices and Experiences in WASH Sector Learning

Meeting Report and Framework Concept for a
Nile-region Learning and Practice Alliance

5-6 March 2008
Hotel Africana, Kampala, Uganda



Meeting
Report

Research-inspired Policy and Practice Learning in Ethiopia and the Nile region (RiPPLE) is a five-year research programme consortium funded by the UK's [Department for International Development](#) (DFID). It aims to advance evidence-based learning on water supply and sanitation (WSS) focusing specifically on issues of planning, financing, delivery and sustainability and the links between sector improvements and pro-poor economic growth.

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I Introduction

This meeting was convened as part of RiPPLE, a DFID funded Research Programme Consortium based in Ethiopia, and facilitated by Nadia Manning of IWMI.

Part of the RiPPLE mandate is to develop better research and learning processes within the Nile region. The meeting was a way of kick starting this process through sharing existing experience and knowledge, and thinking through how to institutionalise better research and learning at a regional level in the future. Participants were invited from a number of Nile region countries. The spread of institutions and countries was as follows:

| Countries | Institutions |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| Kenya (7) | Government (6) |
| Tanzania (1) | NGOs (17) |
| Sudan (1) | Research Institutes (6) |
| Ethiopia (16) | Private sector (3) |
| Rwanda (1) | Agencies (5) |
| Uganda (11) | |



Participants 'locating themselves' as part of introductions led by Nadia Manning

This report summarises the most significant discussion and action points arising from the meeting and is divided into sections on each session. This is not an exhaustive transcript of the meeting, but seeks to demonstrate the rationale and logic behind the concept note to establish a regional learning platform, provided in outline in Section 8.

2 Purpose and structure

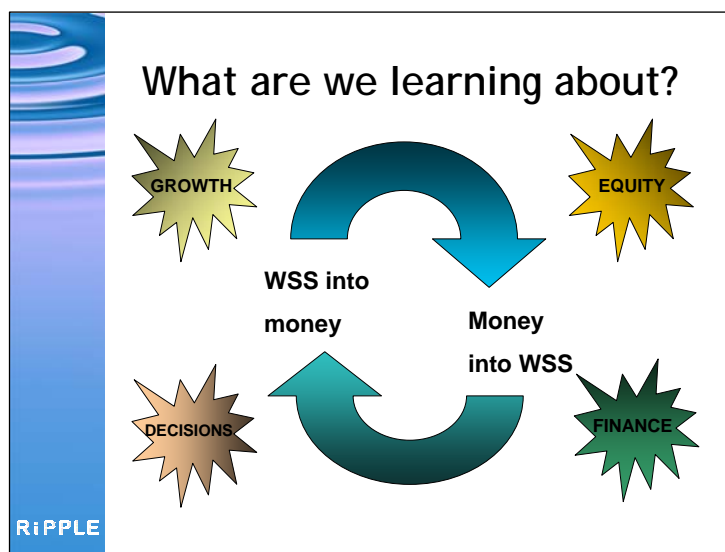
The purpose of the meeting was to share research and learning approaches and experiences between policy makers and practitioners in the Nile region, and to explore potential mechanisms for improved sharing of sector research and learning at a Nile regional level.

Key questions for sharing of experiences:

- What examples of sector learning and research have had a substantial direct or indirect policy or practice impact?
- What were the specific attributes that enabled the research and learning to have an impact?
- What kinds of institutional innovations and other factors have improved sector learning and research processes?
- Where and why have there been substantial barriers to research and learning within the sector?
- How can experience from other sectors help to improve research and learning in the WASH sector?
- What specific challenges are there in scaling up and mainstreaming sector research and learning in the sector?
- How might a regional learning and practice alliance contribute to greater achievement of sector targets?

The meeting was structured around key presentations followed by work in smaller groups, including presentations of shorter case studies to those groups. This enabled a more flexible arrangement and less time spent in plenary sessions. It also helped to introduce an important element of informality to the proceedings and discussions, which encourage an open flow and sharing of ideas.

After a presentation by Jo Smet on the purpose of the meeting, the RiPPLE Director Alan Nicol described the stage at which the RiPPLE programme now stood, and how it was now entering the ‘second third’ of its five-year funding period. During this period the work accomplished in Ethiopia to date would be shared widely across the region and a key purpose was now to enable more effective regional-level learning processes.



He emphasised that the use of the term ‘colloquium’ rather than ‘workshop’ was to emphasise the more informal learning environment that RiPPLE hoped to create, which would enhance sharing and promote dialogue with and between all participants. He outlined the key thematic areas of RiPPLE, the overarching programme concept, asking the question: what is RiPPLE trying to increase learning on? (See slide left.)

The programme could be understood in 'thirds' with the establishment and development phase now giving way to 20 months of integration and implementation under long-term action research studies, leading to a final third which might focus on impact and sustainability at the level of water supply and sanitation intervention. He emphasised the RiPPLE approach to partnership at different levels and the balance—or trade-off—between maintaining policy relevance whilst achieving practical outcomes. The transfer of learning processes and their embedding in local contexts was given particular importance: RiPPLE learning should be integrated with existing mechanisms and new processes should be locally-owned and sustainable after the RiPPLE programme has come to an end.

3 Session I: Concepts in research and learning

3.1 Key concepts in research and learning

This discussion was based on a hand-out shared with the group. A particular focus was around the question “what is social learning”? Social learning is a key aim of this colloquium itself and the further interactions at Nile-regional level around water supply and sanitation which the colloquium hoped to establish.

Participants described social learning as “the exchange of experiences in a group of people engaged together in a social activity” and “learning through doing together, observing and experiencing”. Interactive learning and creative learning were suggested as different aspects of social learning. Interesting discussion took place over where the key barriers are for learning in the water sector: do these barriers lie *between actors in the same sector, or between sectors?* Participants concluded that both were important: within a sector there may be parallel learning processes with no interaction or learning between them, and at the same time intersectoral learning is often weak. But water demands interaction between sectors, and there *are* positive examples of cross-sectoral learning. It was noted that at the community level the compartmentalisation of water into sectors becomes irrelevant, because people require integrated services. Effective learning and practice must therefore integrate a variety of sectors.

Some challenges were made to the model presented (“learning→ implementation→ impact”). Some emphasised the complexities of the environments in which learning translates into implementation, and hence into impact, so environments as much as processes may be important in changing outcomes. It was argued that it is a difficult challenge to transform societies through learning and the adoption of new, sustained activities based on this learning.

For example, WSP had been working to influence policy for six years yet a recent review showed little policy impact has been achieved. Any regional learning platform must therefore learn from these experiences and recognise the challenges faced. It is also key to engage policymakers and policy-influencers (including civil society) from the start.



Vincent Njuona discussing ‘key concepts’

3.2 Group Work: What supports or hinders learning?

Participants shared their experiences of existing learning and experience-sharing platforms, highlighting the successes that these platforms had achieved and the challenges faced. A summary of the findings is presented below.

Existing platforms for learning: In Uganda these include events such as the annual sanitation and hygiene event in Uganda, the development of a multi-sectoral working group and the LeaPs programme, which has established policy and practice learning groups on sanitation in households and schools.

In Ethiopia both the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) and the Forum for the Environment are active in sharing learning within the sector—more recently the Ministry of Water Resources has established (with RiPPLE support) a Forum for Learning on Water and Sanitation (FLoWS). This will feed learning over the year into the annual MSF. RiPPLE Learning and Practice Alliances have also been developed at regional level (in SNNPR, Benishangul and Oromiya (East Hararghe Zone), and in two woredas in each region. In Tanzania, water point mapping has been used as an opportunity for learning. Social learning also takes place through exchange visits. Generally, sector and policy review processes offer opportunities for learning between stakeholders, and other sector learning platforms should link to these processes in particular.

At a transboundary level, the Global Water Partnership (GWP) operates internationally, regionally and also in some Nile countries (e.g. the Ethiopia Country Water Partnership and Kenya Water Partnership). In Ethiopia the Eco-Nile initiative has brought together three key countries in the region and helped in sharing experience and research on a ‘track-two’ basis, i.e. in parallel with government.

Other important learning processes include informal knowledge sharing between similar organisations, and, within some organisations, internal learning using the intranet and in-house presentations. These are less structured than formal networks but were felt to be just as important as learning mechanisms.



Sarah Naigaga explaining her group's output

Suggested principles for shared learning: A number of clear principles emerged from the discussions. First, it is necessary to be clear about the starting point for research and learning. It is also important to let the community conduct its own research and generate learning processes appropriate to their contexts (and in so doing respect community definitions and approaches). A key part of the learning process should then be the 'return' of research findings to the community and assessment of their feedback.

Experience from Rwanda, Burundi and DRC suggests that gender mainstreaming and the training of trainers are important aspects in developing effective learning, while Ethiopian participants highlighted the importance of piloting and demonstrating new approaches as part of wider learning on, for example, integrated water resource management. Recognizing the need for brevity and quick dissemination of results was also highlighted by Kenyan participants.

Successes of current learning approaches: The localizing of gender mainstreaming was emphasized as a success factor in some current approaches in Kenya and DRC. Learning can also ignite the participation of partners, and hence could be regarded as an intrinsically developmental activity. Shared learning can also help in identification of lead agencies in specific areas - e.g. on sanitation and health – potentially leading to better service delivery. Other successes included successful identification of areas of innovation, including financing and the development of popular awareness on key water resource issues.

Existing learning platforms could help in identifying stakeholders at different levels and on 'focusing' learning on key sector development areas, as well as linking components and sectors together. Some existing platforms also benefited from research areas identified being tied closely to specific tasks and therefore garnering high interest amongst staff in different organizations. In achieving this kind of buy-in more generally, one success factor highlighted was the importance of individual or organizational 'champions'.

Challenges faced by platforms: These were numerous, but centred around issues of inclusion, process and communication.

Inclusion: Problems of inclusion relate to both the subject of research (what to include), and the sharing of findings and data (how and who to include). It is a challenge to be clear about which situations and which actors the learning will apply to, and make sure that learning is framed as broadly as possible to include, for example, both rural and urban water and sanitation sectors. Representation of different stakeholders in designing the research should be fair, and, overall a lack of data sharing between and within organizations and networks was highlighted as one significant problem hindering improved learning, particularly at national and regional levels.

Process: Some challenges relate to the process of establishing successful learning processes where there are, for instance, clashing institutional interests and different mandates, making relevant joint learning a challenge. Balancing a bottom-up approach and the need for top-down input and quality control was a challenge, as was coordination of processes involving several institutions as they are widely dispersed, as many civil society organisations are.

Irregular participation at learning events, due to other pressures on participants' time, lack of commitment from partners, was regarded as difficult to avoid but could undermine the learning process. Other challenges related more to impact – it is difficult to change the way individuals and

organisations think – and learning which challenged existing practices could be damaging to relationships and create conflicts among and within organizations and networks.

Winning policy attention to learning at different levels is not easy. Even where there is a willingness to take forward learning and new approaches in government, resources may not be sufficient to support either the learning process in the long-term or new implementation based on new approaches. Keeping findings from research and learning updated was also identified as a challenge, as this demands time and resources and information is not always easily available. However it is important that findings are up to date in order to be relevant and useful to practitioners.

Communication: Cultural barriers could hinder communication across and within learning processes, and learning processes should seek to break these down and be as open as possible. ‘Fixed ideas’ and ‘single issue’ agendas could also hinder open communications. In some political-cultural contexts government could be unwilling to learn, or collaborate across knowledge ‘silo’ and within different bureaucratic hierarchies. It may therefore be difficult to engage government in learning processes. One entry point was the targeting of key individuals or departments and that how, for example, research findings were presented – especially to government – could affect the willingness of not to learn from them. The positive experience of RiPPLE’s case study work in Ethiopia was mentioned in this respect.

4 Sessions 2 & 3: Research and Learning Experience

4.1 Regional case studies

Participants presented two regional case studies on existing learning processes, one from the Nile Basin and one from Uganda.

Econile - Eastern Nile Basin: Econile from the Nile Basin was presented by Yacob Arsano, Dean of Social Sciences at Addis Ababa University. He explained the experience of the Econile programme from 1999 to 2007 which brought together PhD candidates from both the North and South (represented by three Eastern Nile countries, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia).

The programme followed a track-two format to bring different actors together in free and open discussions, which were professionally moderated. A first round of peer-reviewed articles on comparative national perspectives from the three countries on Nile issues was followed by a second round of dialogue in 2003 with policy makers, but working in a private capacity. A third round brought together academics and policy makers and culminated in a trilateral regional training seminar in Addis Ababa in January 2006 with postgraduate students and trainers.

Lessons learnt included the value of identification of common concerns, greater mutual understanding and the expression of shared aspirations. These helped to generate a commitment to shared learning and cooperation, and an agreement to continue dialogue, as well as to carry out public joint work. The need for similar rounds of joint training was highlighted.

Weak ownership 'stakes', dependence on external support (principally Swiss funding) and a lack of continuity were highlighted as core challenges the programme faced.



Yacob Arsano explaining Econile to participants

BROSDI – Uganda: A second regional case study - the Busoga Rural Open Source and Development Initiative (BROSDI) - was presented by Executive Director Karamagi Akiiki Ednah. She highlighted how research and learning processes were used at a community level for programme and project development, monitoring and evaluation and gap filling.

BROSDI uses a combination of knowledge sharing, information management and ICT approaches to

engage communities in a collaborative process that helps them to identify the issues affecting them. Based on these identified issues BROSDI helps communities to design appropriate interventions across a range of programmes, covering education, health and agriculture. Strong local partner involvement in the learning process helps to instill a sense of ownership, volunteerism, determination to make the process work and, ultimately, more sustainable outcomes through community empowerment. However it was acknowledged to be a sometimes slow and resource-intensive process.

4.2 World Café on experience sharing

The following group work took the form of a ‘World Café approach’ in which participants rotated between tables so that several topics were each discussed by a number of different groups, each building on the discussion of the previous group. The four core topics were *policy development processes*, *practice-oriented processes*, *inter-sectoral learning* and *networks*.

The outputs of the four groups are summarised below.

Policy development processes

This table’s key question was: *what makes a good policy process and how can learning influence policy?*

The group outputs focused on the attributes of good policy and the barriers to an effective learning process for policy development.

The *attributes of good policy* include clarity around the issues, goals and objectives that are the subject of the policy. Policy should be based on stakeholder consultation—i.e. be broadly owned—and the means to translate policy into action should be established through rules and regulations. Policy should be comprehensive not narrow, and be linked, as far as possible, with other sectors and learning from those sectors. Importantly, policy should be based on strong evidence and learning. An ongoing review process and the flexibility to improve was important. Finally, policy must be well communicated to be effective at all levels otherwise good policy could ‘evaporate’ in implementation—hence learning platforms as communications vehicles could play a crucial role in policy success.

Barriers to effective policy development processes include political interference and the often donor-driven processes and agendas within policy development, which could crowd-out learning, particularly at a local level. Inadequate institutional capacity meant that policy processes could be poor (ill-informed, for instance), and poorly translated into effective implementation. A lack of funds was obviously partly to blame, but levels of success were also related to political buy-in and the capacity to harmonise and build on existing bodies of policy. If policy is developed ‘after the law’, this tended to lead to problems of inflexibility.

Practice-oriented processes

This table asked: *how learning can improve practice in the sector, and address areas of implementation that are not working?*

The group concluded that learning can most effectively improve practice if it is based on multi-stakeholder involvement. There is a need to generate consensus around learning, and the media can be useful in this respect—particularly at a national level. Critical reflection on past experiences was important, as well as conducting baseline studies and establishing mechanisms for feedback, even though these may be costly, at the level of project implementation. Briefing communities on these

processes and the use of research would be critical to gaining wide buy-in in the process of practical implementation.

Particular emphasis was placed on engaging communities in active learning and on using existing channels and processes rather than reinvention. Demonstration and the use of champions at all levels could help in generating interest in practical application of new knowledge. Establishing and demonstrating clear routes linking learning and practice was important and the use of exchange visits could help in facilitating learning-practice links.

Learning between sectors

This table focused on the question: *how to promote learning between sectors?*

Some examples of intersectoral learning were highlighted. As well as inclusion of additional sectors in the RiPPLE LPA process, the case of fluoride removal in the Rift Valley in Ethiopia had attracted the involvement of the Ministry of Health, the Science and Technology Commission as well as the water sector. In Uganda, integrated district level planning already included a variety of sectors.

Various suggestions to promote intersectoral learning were generated, and it was noted that IWRM could offer good learning ground as it had relevance for different sectors with different mandates.

More broadly, it was regarded as critical to focus on common goals, to work at local and national levels at once, and to develop strategic plans in a participatory fashion. This included a range of sectors, and making specific efforts to ensure national development programmes tackled cross-cutting issues.

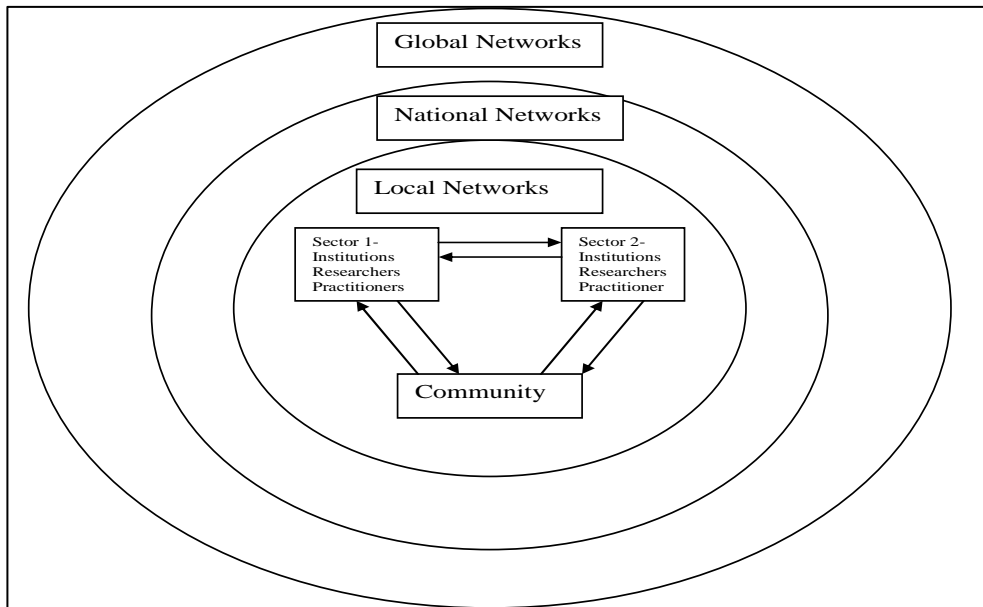
Decentralisation could facilitate intersectoral learning if decision-making was brought closer to the level of implementation where cross-sectoral issues were inevitably encountered. It could also help to reduce conflicts between sectors. Examples of joint activities at local level included the development of health posts which were also used for the storage of fertilisers. It would be interesting to compare the experience of integrated district level planning from Uganda with experiences in Ethiopia and Kenya; these countries have all made moves towards more decentralised planning, but in different ways. A key statement reiterated again was that *'Communities do not see things from a sector approach'*.

Networks and learning

This table focused on *how interconnected networks at different levels could help to maximise learning and experience sharing, i.e. global, regional and local networks.*

For effective learning, networks, institutions, researchers and practitioners from different sectors and the community should be effectively linked together. It was important to be aware that members of learning networks will range from very active contributors to those less heavily-involved members who collaborated irregularly or simply made use of a network's findings. Networks also varied depending on what they intended to achieve, and they could be short or long-term in duration.

Some ways to ensure networks were more effective included focusing on tools and methods, best practice and monitoring and evaluation. It was critical to establish trust among members and build confidence in the added value of taking part. Identifying common interests and promoting accountability, openness and commitment among members would help to build this trust.



Group output illustrating interconnected networks

It was important to think about the incentives for participants to take part in networks. These could be related to formalising the network, for example through a binding document, or the institutionalization of networks. But most importantly, networks should offer value to their members. This could be by providing access to up to date information, disseminating knowledge and practice effectively, and offering opportunities for training or enhancing the skills of participants.

Observations on the World Café session

Participants felt that the experience of group work at this colloquium itself offered important lessons for learning processes. Sitting at a table with people from other sectors was felt to be intrinsically valuable and participants learned from it. Nevertheless, a noted challenge was in reaching common understanding when participants had different focuses and used their 'own' technical terminologies. Any learning network established regionally would need to be aware of this and take steps to facilitate greater understanding.

5 Session 4: International Case Studies

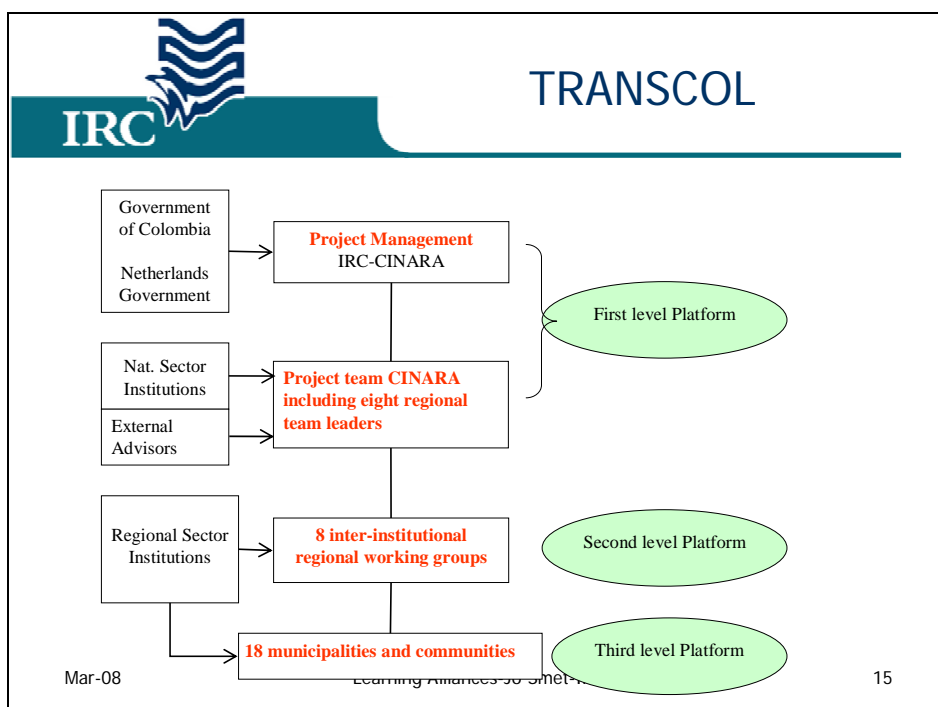
On day two, further—and wider—experience was shared, particularly focusing on the Learning Alliance approach, an increasingly prevalent approach to learning in a number of sectors and one which had recently been adopted by a variety of water and sanitation programmes around the world. Two international case studies were presented: the *TRANSCOL* programme from Colombia and *Empowers* from the Middle East.

In the lead-in to discussing the *Empowers* and *TRANSCOL* experiences, Jo Smet highlighted the chief tenets of the Learning Alliance Approach. This approach arose out of a perceived failure of research to lead to significant impacts on policy and practice, because of factors including limited institutional ownership, the challenges of scaling up innovation, and weaknesses in dissemination and capacity building.

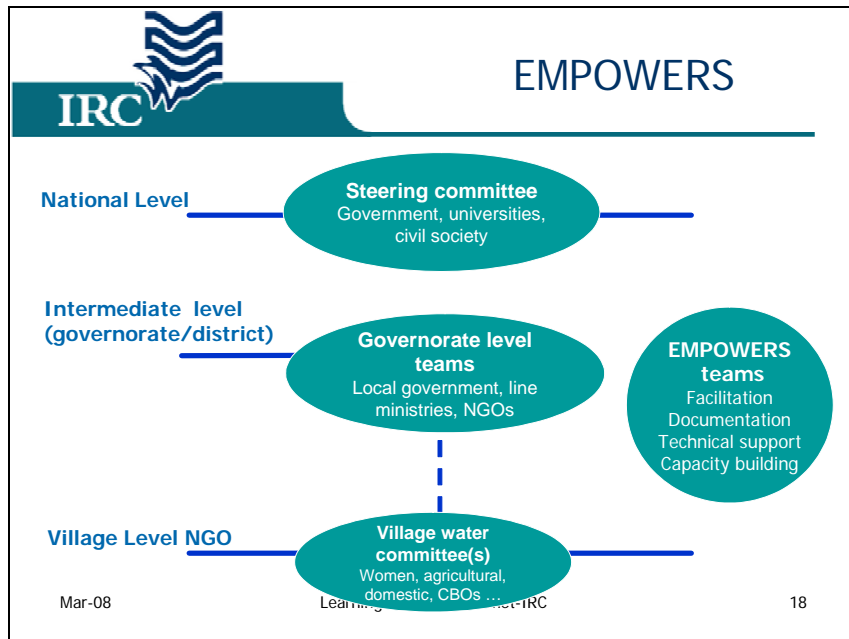
A Learning Alliance consists of a series of interconnected multi-stakeholder ‘platforms’ at different institutional levels, which seek to engender innovation by breaking down horizontal and vertical barriers to information sharing. The idea is that this enables faster identification of challenges, uptake of best practice and the scaling up of sector ‘innovations’. A number of contributing factors help to ensure the success of Learning Alliances, including an effective institutional host, good facilitation skills, and champions who can help maintain momentum and have the capacity to influence partners and decision-makers.

Challenges widely faced in developing Learning Alliances included appropriate incentive for participation, the need for sufficient time for participants to understand their differences and build trust, and effective process documentation to understand whether and how change is achieved. Activities carried out by Learning Alliances could include stakeholder analysis and mobilisation, action research and capacity development.

He then introduced the *TRANSCOL* example (see slide, below). *TRANSCOL* was a technology transfer programme in Colombia which used a participatory approach at three levels:



Lessons learnt from TRANSCOL included the importance of scaling up and replication sustained by communities. However, it was found that scaling up was limited by the need for institutional support. Some capacity had been developed at intermediate levels, and there had been some follow-up in sector learning. The facilitating organisation had also managed to establish a position for itself in the sector as a result of the process.



The second example presented was EMPOWERS, a regional partnership in Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. Empowers sought to enhance local-level IWRM through participatory planning and management, stakeholder dialogue and empowerment of end-users (see below).

Lessons learnt included the need to build skills for this kind of LA approach and the necessary – but often neglected—role of process documentation. Careful selection of initial partners and partnership building should be given high priority. To facilitate effectively it was necessary to carefully address the sometimes conflicting roles of the country team and it was important to understand where and how facilitation skills could be institutionalised after the project.

In conclusion, there were different ways of establishing Learning Alliances—i.e. no blueprint—and that scaling up frequently required local government participation, which, thought sometimes difficult and frustrating to achieve, was critical. It was also important for members to define their own learning needs and to participate in action research.

These case studies stimulated a discussion about the nature and process of Learning Alliances. It was suggested that they could be very powerful and go beyond technical learning to influence political issues, actors and power relationships. This influence could be achieved both by the direct participation of decision-makers in the various platforms, thereby enhancing exposure to evidence of what works or does not work, but also by indirectly strengthening civil society through these alliances.

A key question was how long a Learning Alliance could 'last'. Some felt that they should be longstanding structures, others that they should be more project- or issue-based and be limited in their duration (e.g. a period five years). The importance of host institutions and facilitators was emphasized, because their role was critical in ensuring ownership by participants.

This discussion was followed by presentation of four case studies from the Nile region that showed examples of situations in which learning alliance concepts could be applied:

Water point mapping in Tanzania (WaterAid, Concern, ISF and SNV): In Tanzania, water point mapping had been used to highlight critical issues including the lack of a clear sense of ownership and the weak linkages between districts and user communities. The coverage data gathered by the mapping process had been used at a national level to help balance resource distribution, and at district level to ensure realistic planning. Locally it had been instrumental in stimulating strengthened user demand. Key challenges included how to update the database in the future as it remained unclear by whom or how often this should be done.

Urban water and sanitation in Kibera, Kenya (Practical Action): This programme presented by Paul Chege worked in a 'village' of about 144,000 residents within the Kibera informal settlement, of whom only 16% had access to sanitation. The programme involved strong community consultations and training, including child-to-child training and teacher training.

Conflict-sensitive water provision in Uganda: This presentation emphasised that there were important strides to make in conflict-sensitive approaches to water provision. The programme looked in particular at conflict avoidance in the implementation of new schemes. Without care, these could lead to divisions within or between communities. Important ways in which research and learning could strengthen conflict prevention included strengthening water management structures at grassroots levels and expanding existing approaches to include conflict analysis prior to design and implementation. Scaling up good practice and innovation meant finding 'innovative ways to further strengthen software work', perhaps involving greater numbers of local government workers and the application of learning alliance approaches.

Learning from practice and policy in sanitation and hygiene in Uganda (Netwas, SNV & IRC): LeaPPs focuses on accelerated coverage and use of household and school sanitation and hygiene and is a partnership of SNV, Netwas Uganda and IRC. The programme has identified a number of areas for improvement across Uganda including the functioning at a district level of planning, harmonization, coordination and implementation between organizations, better district-national level communication, sharing of good practice within and, beyond Uganda, joint learning processes. The programme has established multi-stakeholder learning platforms and linked these at different levels, including a national sanitation working group for learning and scaling up. Anticipated outputs are more and sustained sanitation and hygiene behavior improvements at household and school levels, greater empowerment within communities, women's groups, schools and entrepreneurs, and improved political leadership to drive forward the sanitation agenda in Uganda.

Participants then fed back their comments and observations on key issues involved in working with the Learning Alliance approach. Participants agreed that some key elements of a successful Learning Alliance seem to be the existence of 'champions', establishing effective incentives for members, good facilitators (who should perhaps be neutral or external parties), and strong documentation. Further, it is important that Learning Alliances incorporate a strong feedback loop to support ongoing

learning, and that the learning should have clear objectives and focus. The platform should be owned by its members, and the different levels and stages of a Learning Alliance should be well-connected to make a true “alliance”. There was discussion of whether Learning Alliances needed to generate new knowledge, or whether just sharing existing knowledge was sufficiently valuable in some cases. Finally a concern was raised about how—and how far—Learning Alliances could address difficult politics and power relations, particularly the political economies at different levels that drive real decision making over policy choices and the allocation of resources.

Finally, two existing networks in the Nile region were presented, both of which focus on water. A future regional approach to sector learning might link with these networks and build on their experiences.

First, Simon Thuo (Regional Coordinator—East Africa) presented the *Global Water Partnership for Eastern Africa*: The GWP was founded as a technical organisation but has now established broad, multi-stakeholder regional and country water partnerships to engage with local policy and implementation. The main focus is IWRM. The Eastern Africa GWP has fostered five country water partnerships (CWPs) in the region – in Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda – and is developing one in Rwanda.

In Kenya and Eritrea, the CWP has supported the preparation of IWRM plans and policies by strengthening stakeholder involvement and cross-sectoral collaboration, and promoted the integration of IWRM in the PRSP. In Ethiopia and Sudan the CWPs focus more on conflict mitigation (including transboundary conflicts), while in Burundi the focus is on promoting community priorities for irrigation and water supply, though IWRM remains a key theme throughout.

In general the GWP supports sector monitoring and evaluation by providing toolkits and guidance. A range of possible future research areas for GWP were proposed which could be linked to a regional learning mechanism. These include food security, land use and pastoralism, sanitation and water quality, and climate change.



Simon Thuo explaining GWP and Country Water Partnerships

Sarah Naigaga (Nile Basin Discourse Coordinator) then presented the experience of the **Nile Basin Discourse (NBD)**: The NBD is a network of civil society organisations that was established to

facilitate the involvement of civil society in the planning and implementation of developments in the Nile Basin. It focuses mainly on development processes as envisaged by the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). The NBD approach includes building its constituency, stakeholder identification and analysis, establishing a platform for dialogue through consultative workshops and information sharing, research and dissemination, and capacity building activities.

The main lessons learned by the NBD are the importance of good timing (in terms of initiating activities, and responding and reacting to developments), relevancy (having clarity on goals and the value-added of activities), capacity (the skills of personnel involved and the quality of outputs), the need for resources to support long term continuity, and persistence. There are continuing challenges in terms of slow progress in policy influence, the lack of a platform for feedback, and inadequate funding for programmes, but persistence has already enabled the NBD to overcome a number of challenges.

6 Session 5: Towards a regional approach

In the final session participants discussed how to take forward sector learning in the Nile region, focusing on the *processes*, *outcomes* and *goals* of the proposed regional alliance.

Process: Participants felt that a regional alliance should link strongly to existing learning structures at different levels, and connect them together through interlinked platforms at sub-national, national and regional levels. It should include actors from the water and sanitation sector and from other relevant sectors. In terms of establishment, it was suggested that the alliance would need to find hosting institutions at country and regional level, and would need a lead agency for coordination as well as champions to drive the process forward.

There was a range of views on the structure of the alliance – some participants favoured a more formalised structure with official terms of reference and MoUs established with partners, while others proposed a looser, informal alliance. It was agreed that it would be better to start more informally before increasing the formalisation as the alliance developed. There was also debate on the frequency of meetings; but an annual regional meeting was suggested and agreed.

There was also agreement that regular meetings and joint activities would be needed to maintain relationships. Proposed activities were the development of a website, possibly with an online discussion forum (RiPPLE to lead), the production and dissemination of publications synthesizing lessons, and the establishment of a resource centre and pooled fund for joint learning activities. Finally, to institutionalise the platform it was suggested that links should be forged with AMCOW, ANEW and other Africa-wide initiatives.



Jo Smet and Aychew Adane mapping their thoughts on ways forward

Outcomes

Participants proposed a range of outcomes which they would like to see from a regional learning alliance. These centred on increased information flows and wider dissemination of knowledge, leading to more evidence-based practice leading to improved implementation and better use of water resources. Further key outcomes would be the scaling up of best experience and demand-driven research, together leading to better programming, improved coordination and collaboration between

sector actors and the institutionalisation of learning and documentation. Better linkages to global learning could also be achieved as could a changed attitude towards local learning and capacity building.

Goals

Participants suggested their vision of what a regional learning alliance should be. The alliance should share experiences and knowledge between sectors, countries and levels through vibrant interaction. It should strengthen existing platforms for learning, be cost-effective and innovative, and make the best use of existing experience to enhance innovation and scale up best practices. Finally it should inform and influence government policy on sector issues (and bring this knowledge to other sectors), and improve sector policy and service delivery. This should ultimately benefit the livelihoods of the poor in the Nile region.



Thinking through approaches to the Nile-LPA

7 Ways Forward

Finally, next steps were agreed as follows:

- A meeting report to be produced including a *framework concept* (to be taken further by Netwas, Kenya into a full proposal for funding under the guidance of a review group comprising Alan Nicol, Yacob Arsano, Getnet Alemu, Alemayehu Haddis, Jo Smet, Zemedede Abebe, Elizabeth Wamera and Sarah Naigaga)
- Identification of existing resource centres (e.g. Netwas Uganda) and sharing with the core group (workshop participants)
- A website/web portal and other web-based communication to be developed by mid-June (RiPPLE to lead)



Nadia Manning driving participants to agree next steps

The network was then christened the: **“Nile-regional Learning and Practice Alliance in the Water and Sanitation Sector” (Nile-LPA).**

At the end participants were invited to comment on their experience of the colloquium or raise issues on the future development of a regional learning alliance. One key thought was that ‘conventional’ attitudes and approaches are very fixed in people’s minds and can be hard to change, so learning would take time.

It was suggested that learning models, rather than local details from elsewhere, should be the focus because these can be transplanted more effectively. Finally, many participants agreed that learning and research for change was key, and that a single regional alliance could effectively consolidate learning and build collaboration between a range of partners.

8 Concept Note for a Nile-LPA in WSS

Participants at the Colloquium expressed enthusiasm for a Nile-region wide alliance for research and learning in the sector. In their view, the Nile-LPA should be a vibrant platform for sharing experience and knowledge between different countries, sectors and levels. It should promote innovation and best practice, and inform policy and service delivery leading to livelihood benefits for the poor.

Goal: To establish a Nile-Regional Learning and Practice Alliance (Nile-LPA) to promote greater learning and innovation in the sector.

Concept: The development of the Nile-LPA will draw on RiPPLE's experience of LPA establishment in Ethiopia, and experience from elsewhere, and adapt these experiences to the different challenges involved in working at a regional level. Linkages will be built between the Nile-LPA and existing alliances at national and sub-national level in Ethiopia, as well as with other learning and coordination platforms in Nile basin countries.

The Nile-LPA will be a "light-touch" platform in terms of frequency of plenary meetings and the management of the platform. Several networks already exist which relate to sector issues in the Nile basin*, and in facilitating the Nile-LPA RiPPLE will not seek to duplicate these, but to embed the alliance within existing platforms as a wider research and learning forum.

The Nile-LPA will therefore be hosted by a regional initiative such as the Global Water Partnership for Eastern Africa (to be determined by August 2008) with initial support and facilitation by RiPPLE. The Nile-LPA will be run and facilitated by the host organisation with support from RiPPLE in the longer term, subject to available external funding.

The model for the Nile-LPA is a forum of stakeholders from the water and sanitation and other sectors, who will come together to develop and undertake a joint research and learning agenda in the Nile Basin.

Additional funding will be sought for members of the Nile-LPA to undertake joint transboundary research programmes, pilot projects and capacity building activities to enhance learning, and improve the policy and practice of water and sanitation delivery in the region (including in the context of wider IWRM challenges).

Regional research will emphasise shared transboundary learning, new research partnerships and will include strong linkages to local level partnerships with local civil society organisations, government and other implementers.

The technology choice study currently underway in Ethiopia and Sudan (under the RiPPLE programme) offers an example of joint case study research and learning around an issue of common interest that can be built upon. Joint research will also be linked to the Long-Term Action Research Studies (LARS) currently being developed in Ethiopia on the themes of *Growth* and the *Universal Access Plan (UAP)*. For example, suggestions made at the colloquium for a comparative study of sector planning under decentralisation in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda could form part of the planned LARS on Ethiopia's UAP.

* For example GWP-East Africa, ANEW, Netwas, NBI, NBD

Meetings of the Nile LPA will take place annually for reporting on activities, experience-sharing and the discussion of new agendas. However these plenary meetings are not the major focus of the LPA—rather support the structure and process of alliance activities *in between* meetings.

They will facilitate and support the maintenance of partnerships between Nile-LPA members particularly around joint research activities but also around capacity building and communication activities. The formation of informal subgroups around particular issues is expected and will be encouraged. As far as possible these structures and processes will be triggered and sustained by easy-to-access web-based discussion for a initially hosted on the RiPPLE website*. This will provide an opportunity for LPA members to share thoughts in informal discussions, post documents and invite other stakeholder to participate in shared learning. Later, options for full online conferencing will be explored if this option is of interest to LPA members.

Strong links will be forged between the Nile-LPA and RiPPLE's current activities in Ethiopia. Joint research activities will be developed between members of the Nile-LPA and different LPA levels, and the Nile LPA will have opportunities to input into research plans in Ethiopia, to ensure relevance to the broader Nile region.

Exchanges of LPA members will take place between the different platforms, subject to available funding. Communication between LPAs will be facilitated by the LPA bulletin, web portal and attendance at meetings of the different platforms.

Capacity building will be an important aspect of the Nile-LPA. This includes potentially expanding RiPPLE's capacity building activities in Ethiopia, for example tailoring of the MSc module in use at Addis Ababa University for use in other universities in the region, and training of journalists on sector issues. A member of staff from the LPA host organisation or RiPPLE Office will be supported to attend a "Training the Trainers" workshop run by ODI's RAPID Programme. This will equip them to train LPA participants in evidence-based policy engagement.

RiPPLE will map existing resource centres relating to sector issues in the region, and explore the demand for a regional electronic resource centre to be established on the RiPPLE website and to be hosted, eventually, by a regional organisation. This would increase access to information on sector issues. In particular, these resources will be made available to journalists as part of RiPPLE's work with the media, and links with media organisations and journalism training centres will be made across the region, including with networks such as the Nile Media Network. These links with the media will help in the dissemination of research findings and best practice generated by the Nile-LPA.

Membership: Membership of the Nile LPA will be open to a wide range of government institutions, academic/research centres, civil society organisations, the private sector, and existing networks and partnerships.

While the focus is on the WASH sector, participation will be sought from other key sectors including agriculture and health: building bridges between sectors is a key goal and opportunity. A cross-section of these organisations attended the Colloquium, but more outreach is required to increase representation. The following in particular will be invited to take part:

- Regional and Country Water Partnerships

* It is expected that this will be up and running by early June 2008.

- Water and Sanitation Program
- Netwas
- National and regional NGOs and NGO networks
- Universities, training centres and research institutes
- Water Ministries / Authorities
- Health Ministries
- Agriculture Ministries
- Consultants
- Nile Basin Initiative
- Nile Basin Discourse
- African Union
- AMCOW
- ANEW
- Africa Union
- UN Economic Commission for Africa
- Inter-Governmental Authority on Development

LPA Establishment: Following a six-month development period, the Nile-LPA will be launched at an establishment meeting in January 2009. Ideally this will take the form of a side-event at a relevant regional meeting, or part of a meeting of an existing network such as NETWAS or GWP-East Africa. The meeting will have a number of goals: to formally and publicly launch the Nile-LPA; to agree the broad structure and activities; and, principally, to develop an agreed research agenda for the coming year. This one-day meeting will be followed by a half-day of training in policy engagement for participants.

In the coming six months, preliminary action research proposals will be developed by a small taskforce of colloquium participants (with the potential to act as Nile-LPA champions) and RiPPLE team members. The proposals will focus on RiPPLE's central aim of improving the policy and practice of water and sanitation services in the Nile region through learning processes, and will be conceptually linked to the two RiPPLE LARS, for maximum complementarity with ongoing RiPPLE work in Ethiopia.

These proposals will be shared with prospective Nile-LPA members, and will be posted on the interactive RiPPLE webpage for comments by August 2008. They will then be presented to the establishment meeting for feedback and further shaping. The taskforce will then develop a final research proposal and lead fundraising.

Between June and September 2008, a mapping exercise will be conducted to identify: a) potential LPA members from across the Nile Region; b) existing online resource centres relating to WASH in the region; and c) issues of key concern in research and learning.

9 Annexes

9.1 List of participants (to be revised)

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9.2 Agenda

Wednesday 5th March

| Time | Activity | Responsibility | Notes |
|-------------|--|----------------------|--|
| 08:30-09:00 | Registration and coffee | Secretariat | |
| SESSION I | CONCEPTS IN RESEARCH & LEARNING FOR POLICY & PRACTICE | | |
| 09:00-09:30 | Introduction to objectives, expected outcomes & logistics | Jo Smet & Alan Nicol | |
| 09:30-10:00 | Introductions | Nadia Manning | Who are we & where are we from?! |
| 10:00-10:15 | Key concepts in research and learning | | Hand-out |
| 10:15-10:30 | Key case in research and learning: RiPPLE as an ongoing process | Alan Nicol | Hand-out |
| 10:30-10:45 | Coffee/tea break | | |
| 10.45-11.00 | Group work introduction | Nadia Manning | What supports or hinders learning at the level of individual, organisation, sector and inter-sector? |
| 11.00-12.00 | Group work: Building on concepts: what insights do we have from personal experience? | | Map using cards concepts as they apply to country experiences of individuals |
| 12:00-12:30 | 'Tour de chambre' | | What common issues emerge from a tour of the room? |

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| 12:30-14:00 | Lunch | | |
| SESSION 2: | RESEARCH & LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN THE NILE / EAST-AFRICA REGION | | |
| 14:00-14:15 | Capturing morning session output and introduction to afternoon | Prof. Edward Kairu | |
| 14:15-14:45 | Two key regional cases: Research and policy in Ethiopia and the Nile region, Dr. Yacob Arsano, AAU Regional Learning for Policy & Practice, Dr. Simon Thuo, GWP | | Hand-outs |
| 14:45-15:00 | Group work explanation | | Experiences in sector learning; shared methods and lessons learned |
| 15:00-16:30 | Group work on Regional experiences: World (regional) Café | Liz Wamera; Alemayehu Haddis; Sam Mutono; Nadia Manning | Answering key questions on examples, attributes, innovations, barriers and inter-sectoral learning |
| 16:30-17:00 | 'Tour de chambre' | Prof. Edward Kairu | What can we glean, how can we learn? |
| 17:00-17:30 | Plenary discussion | Prof. Edward Kairu | Summarising our own learning |
| 19:00 | Evening outing: <i>Phase 2</i> | | Facilitated learning... |

Thursday 6th March

| Time | Activity | Responsibility | Notes |
|-------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| SESSION 3: | BROADER EXPERIENCE—BEYOND THE NILE REGION AND THE SECTOR | | |
| 09:00-09:30 | Recap day 1 & intro to day 2 | Vincent Njuguna | What we can learn from beyond the sector and region and how we can bring lessons in. |
| 09:30-10:15 | Two key cases: Learning in WASH among CSOs, Prof. Edward Kairu, ANEW EMPOWER, case from Middle East, Jo Smet, IRC | | |
| 10:15-10:30 | Explanation of group work and identification of case presenters | | |
| 10:30-10:45 | Coffee/tea | | |
| 10:45-11:30 | Group work | Vincent Njuguna | |
| 11:30-12:30 | Presentations of 10 key lessons (across tables...covering issues and challenges) with plenary discussion | | |
| 12:30-14:00 | Lunch | | |
| SESSION 4: | A REGIONAL APPROACH TO NILE / EAST-AFRICAN RESEARCH & LEARNING | | |
| 14:00-14:15 | Introduction to afternoon | Mark Harvey / Nadia Manning | Linking stronger regional learning to stronger regional policy and practice |
| 14:15-15:00 | Plenary discussion on developing a regional approach to sector learning: | | |

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| | what mechanisms, structures, modes of communication and sharing can we build across institutions and disciplines? | | |
| 15:00-15:30 | Synthesis of ideas in groups | | |
| 15:30-15:45 | Coffee/tea | | |
| 15:45-16:15 | Feedback from groups | Alan Nicol / Jo Smet | Develop an agreed framework for thinking and working more effectively at a regional level |
| 16:15-17:00 | Development of a way forward: principles, steps and joint actions | | |
| 17:00 | Close | | |