

Fact Sheet

What is the Learning Alliance approach all about? Why are so many projects in the WASH sector in Ghana following a Learning Alliance approach? What does the approach entail, in theory and in practice? This factsheet provides answers to some of these questions. It also illustrates how the Learning Alliance approach has been applied in practice in Ghana through a variety of projects, programmes and initiatives.

The Learning Alliance approach: what is it all about?

The Learning Alliance approach addresses a number of challenges inherent in strengthening sector knowledge through applied research and development including: ensuring the uptake of research findings; bringing innovations to scale; and dealing with complexity.

What is learning? Learning is the process by which new knowledge is absorbed. Learning takes place in individuals and organisations. Without learning there can be no innovation; no change; no improvement. If we want to be successful as individuals or organisations learning is something we must do throughout our lives: we don't stop learning just because we've left school. Learning Alliances are about encouraging and supporting life-long sector learning.

Under the Learning Alliance approach, stakeholders are brought together in platforms at key institutional levels. Communication both within and between platforms is encouraged, thus breaking down barriers to communication and learning: both horizontally (between different stakeholders at the same institutional level) and vertically (between stakeholders at the different levels). The interlinked platforms are together referred to as a "Learning Alliance".

Different roles and functions

Learning Alliances can play a number of roles including: identification of challenges and implementation of potential solutions; action research to test solutions in practice; communication and sharing of experiences and lessons learnt; advocacy and dialogue leading to changes in policy and legislation; and, strategic planning and coordination. Learning Alliances can also stimulate the dissemination of lessons and results outside of the membership of the alliance itself.

Different shapes and forms

Learning Alliances can adopt a wide range of shapes, forms and intensities, each with its own requirements in terms of facilitation and support. Figure 1 shows the levels of intensity related to different types of learning alliance: from platforms where partial exchange of information takes place within the context of a project, to full partnerships which are responsible for joint planning and sector wide implementation.

What is needed?

Learning Alliance processes are complex and time consuming. They require an institutional host to sustain the process. They require expert facilitation. They require champions who: can bring together stakeholders who may not normally communicate; maintain interest and momentum; have access to power and influence for uptake of outcomes and who know the dynamics of the sector (political, power, disciplinary). There need to be incentives for stakeholder participation in the Learning Alliance process. These can be monetary, but other incentives are often more effective such as: a crisis situation; sector momentum and interest; or the prospect of solutions.

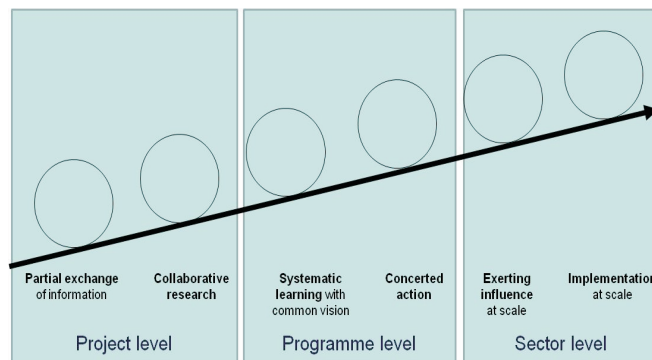


Figure 1: Learning Alliance intensities

Learning Alliance processes take time. Time to understand issues and differences; to build trust; to identify activities, start learning and realise results. Finally, Learning Alliance processes require documentation for monitoring and learning, in order to understand why change was or was not achieved.

The Learning Alliance Approach in Ghana

There have been a number of projects that have adopted the Learning Alliance approach in Ghana. These have included the TPP project, the SWITCH project, the WASHCost Project, the Triple-S project and the WASHTech Project. Furthermore, efforts have been undertaken by the Resource Centre Network Ghana to regularly bring national level stakeholders together in a National Level Learning Alliance Platform. The following paragraphs detail their respective approaches.

The TPP Learning Alliance approach

The Tripartite Partnership (TPP) Project aims at developing and piloting innovative management models for delivering water, sanitation and hygiene services to the urban poor in Ghana. The Learning Alliance approach is a key element of the TPP project. The TPP project started in January 2008 with a workshop in which various institutions shared their initiatives and experiences on how to serve the urban poor. This was, practically speaking, the start of the TPP Learning Alliance process. Since then, TPP has regularly brought a group of key stakeholders together to update them on the results from TPP research and to discuss findings. There have been national level meetings, in which many stakeholders were presented with major findings. In addition, smaller working group meetings focus on discussing and testing preliminary findings. TPP has also co-organised pro-poor sector group meetings, focused on WASH services for the urban poor.

TPP pilots started in early 2010 in three districts: Prestea HuniValley, Mfansiman (Mankessim) and Ashaiman. In these districts, District Level Learning Alliance Platforms have been established, with links to the national level LA platform.

SWITCH and the Accra Learning Alliance

The SWITCH project, which ran from 2006 till 2011, focused on Integrated Urban Water Management in the city of Accra. The project facilitated the establishment of the Accra Learning

Alliance, which was launched in February 2007, with the first SWITCH Accra Stakeholder meeting. Since then, SWITCH city and national level stakeholders have been brought together in thematic workshops (around natural systems, urban agriculture, etc.) and in strategic planning workshops in which stakeholders gave input into the development of a strategic Integrated Urban Water Management plan for Accra. During the Accra Learning Alliance meeting in June 2009, the Learning Alliance members prepared a letter of commitment to formalize their contribution to the Accra Learning Alliance. The Accra Learning Alliance was the mix of city and national level stakeholders, regularly coming together in a “general assembly”, where research findings were presented and the development of a strategic plan for the city was discussed. In addition, the project brought stakeholders together in “thematic working groups” to learn and work more in depth on certain themes.

Learning Alliance approach in the WASHCost Project

The WASHCost Project, which runs from 2008 - 2012, focuses on life cycle cost for the delivery of sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in rural and peri-urban areas. It intends to identify and analyze these costs and how they can be used to improve planning and delivery of WASH services.

The project intended to have a strong Learning Alliance process as well, with Learning Alliance platforms at national and at regional and district level, facilitated by a national coordinator and with a Documentation and Communication Officer (DCO) to document the Learning Alliance Process. A national level platform was initially established, which also provided a platform for a WASH governance training, organised by the WASHCost project consortium members IRC and KNUST.

The National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP): a learning and sharing platform for the entire Ghanaian WASH sector

Due to the similarities in the approach and overlap of the stakeholders involved, the above mentioned projects decided in May 2009 to establish one single National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP), rather than a number of project based platforms. It was agreed that the NLLAP should be organised by the WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN) Secretariat.

RCN Ghana is a network of organizations, institutions, agencies and projects which are committed to improving information and knowledge management and sector learning in the Ghanaian WASH sector. The above mentioned projects are all part of the Resource Centre Network.

The NLLAP was launched in October 2009 and has since then

been held monthly under the banner of RCN Ghana, in collaboration with the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing (MWRWH). The platform brings together a wide variety of sector stakeholders, offering projects and organisations the opportunity to discuss and share on a variety of thematic issues.

Besides the National Level Learning Alliance Platform, stakeholders continue to meet in more focussed project specific working groups, organised under the different projects.

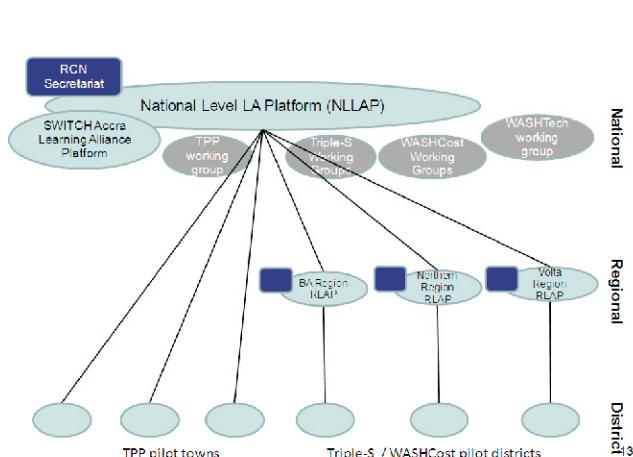
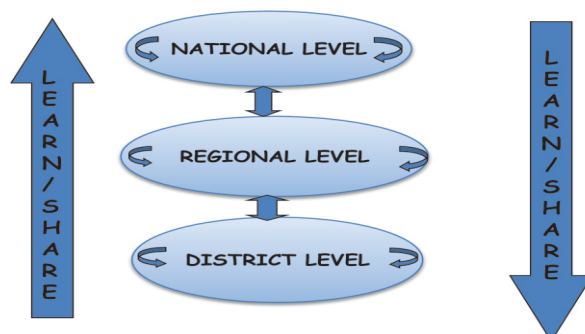


Figure 2: Learning Alliance platforms in Ghana

Linking platforms at different levels

As a Learning Alliance ideally consists of linked platform at key institutional levels, more and more effort is currently going into establishing Learning Alliance Platforms at Regional and District level. This is mainly spearheaded by WASHCost and Triple-S, an initiative promoting sustainable services at scale. The vision is that lessons and experiences from local level will feed into the NLLAP and vice versa. In this way, the Learning Alliance approach will contribute to the further development of the Ghana WASH sector as a learning sector.

Linking Learning Alliance Platforms



This Fact Sheet has been written by Abu Wumbi, RCN Secretariat (awumbi@washghana.net) and Marieke Adank, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (adank@irc.nl), with input from RCN members, most notably TREND Group (TPP), KNUST (SWITCH and WASHCost), CWSA (Triple-S) and IRC. It has been produced by the RCN Ghana Secretariat. The Resource Centre Network (RCN) Ghana is an institutional partnership of organizations who have committed themselves to improve WASH sector learning, through knowledge development and dissemination. For more information contact, rcn@washghana.net or visit: www.washghana.net