

Tripartite Partnership (TPP) approach to
developing innovative management models
for delivering water, sanitation and hygiene
services to the urban poor in Ghana

Strategy Paper

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The TPP Learning
Alliance Approach



Strategy Paper: TPP Learning Alliance approach

The Tripartite Partnership (TPP) Project is a three-year collaborative approach involving Ghanaian and Dutch partners aimed at developing innovative management models for delivering water, sanitation and hygiene services to the urban poor in Ghana. The Learning Alliance (LA) approach is a key element of the TPP project. This strategy paper gives an introduction to the Learning Alliance approach and how this is applied within the TPP project and Ghana in general.

Learning Alliances: what are they all about¹?

The Learning Alliance approach addresses a number of challenges that research and development projects typically face, including: ensuring the uptake of research findings, bringing innovation to scale, and dealing with complexity. This latter is addressed by moving from an overly narrow focus on one aspect of a problem in isolation, towards one that looks at the problem as an integrated whole and adopts a holistic approach to solving it. Under the approach, stakeholders are organised into platforms at key institutional levels, and facilitated in working together to understand the problem, to identify possible solutions, to learn and innovate and, and finally to scale-up. These interlinked platforms at different levels are together referred to as “Learning Alliance”.

Learning alliances typically play a number of roles, including: identification and implementation of innovative actions within a research framework that allows for learning; communication and sharing of results from the learning; advocacy and dialogue leading to changes in policy and legislation where required. The creation of platforms at different levels supports these roles by allowing horizontal communication between different institutions operating at the same institutional level; and vertical communication between field experience and the highest levels of policy making. Learning alliances also stimulate and facilitate structured dissemination of lessons and results outside of the membership of the alliance itself, and can thus play a role in improving (sector) coordination.

Learning alliances can adopt a wide range of types and intensities, each with its own requirements in terms of facilitation and support. The figure below shows the levels of intensity of interaction, moving 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.

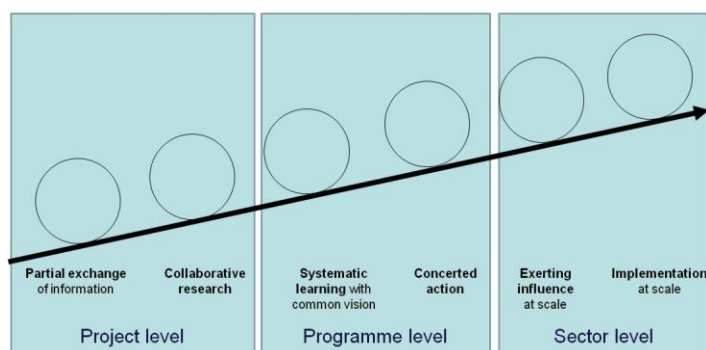


Figure 1: Learning Alliance intensities

¹ For more information of Learning Alliances, please see <http://www.irc.nl/page/14957>

Learning alliance processes are complex and time consuming. They require an institutional host to sustain the process. They require champions who can bring together stakeholders who may not normally communicate, keep the momentum, have access to power and influence for uptake of process 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 more effective are often other incentives such as: a crisis situation, sector momentum and interest, common resources, the prospect of solutions, the prospect of re-election, or force. Learning Alliance processes take time: time to understand differences, to build trust, to open up, to start learning, to realise concerted action etc. Finally, Learning Alliance processes require documentation for monitoring and learning, in order to understand why change was achieved in complex areas, like individual and organisational behaviour.

The TPP Learning Alliance approach

The TPP LA is a platform which brings together a range of stakeholders to share the project findings, exchange knowledge and generate innovation. The stakeholders are drawn from different sector institutions representing the private, public and NGO groups. The meeting of a mixture of actors, creates opportunities for sharing findings, obtaining inputs, new solutions and change. The TPP LA approach encourages a change process involving multi-stakeholder actors to promote the innovative management models and the creation of an enabling environment.

The TPP project considers the national and the district levels in Ghana to be the key institutional levels at which stakeholders can be organized into platforms, forming a Learning Alliance. Regional stakeholders are expected to be represented in the National Level Learning Alliance. Key national level stakeholders involved in WASH service delivery to the urban poor are brought together in the National Level Learning Alliance Platform. These include the Directorates of the sector Ministries like the Water Directorate and the Sanitation Directorate, agencies like the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, responsible for WASH services in rural areas and small towns, the Ghana Water Company Ltd (GWCL) and the current operator AVRIL. Also involved are the Public Utility Regulatory Commission, Academic institutions like KNUST and research projects like the SWITCH project and others like, WaterAid, the private sector, represented by PRUSPA, and NGOs, represented through the Coalition of NGOs CONIWAS.

The National Learning Alliance platform serves as a verification and dissemination platform for research findings and materials from the TPP Project. Furthermore, bringing together stakeholders at national level stimulates networking, sharing, policy dialogue and possibly improved coordination and cooperation among stakeholders. As such, it can play a role in strengthening National Policy and Strategies and in improving the institutional and legal framework. For the TPP project, the relationship between the CWSA and the GWCL is especially interesting, as there seems to be overlap in mandate regarding the provision of water services to small towns. Both institutions have strengths and weaknesses and can potentially learn a lot from each other. Bringing both together and facilitating sharing, learning and discussion can have great impact on WASH service provision for the urban poor.

The district level Learning Alliance Platforms are focused around three pilots and bring together district level government departments, local level NGOs and local level private sector. Stakeholders in these platforms play an active role in the implementation of the pilots. Bringing together the stakeholders at this level ensures that the pilot intervention will be demand driven, problem based and rooted in the local reality. Furthermore, the District Level Learning Alliance will serve as a platform for capacity building and training of local level stakeholders. This will facilitate the uptake of lessons learnt by local stakeholders and will enable scaling-up.

Learning and sharing between the platforms at the different levels, both horizontally within the platforms and between the district level platforms; as well as vertically, between the district level platform and the

National Level Platform is key. In order to facilitate this, representatives from the District Level Learning Alliance Platforms participate in the National Level Learning Alliance Platform and vice versa.

Working groups can be formed when and where appropriate. The working groups can consist of TPP staff, consultants and selected Learning Alliance members, working on a common TPP output.

The TPP Learning Alliance approach in practice

The TPP project began in October 2007 with a workshop in which various institutions, including CWSA, GWCL, PURC, the SWITCH Project and WaterAid 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, the TPP project has regularly brought a group of key stakeholders together to update them on the results from the TPP research and to receive input. The number of participants in the Learning Alliance meetings varies widely. A distinction can be made between general assembly- type meetings, in which many stakeholders are present, mainly to be updated on the progress of the project, and small scale meetings which focus more on discussing preliminary findings and getting feedback on these. TPP pilots have started in early 2010 in three districts. In these districts, Learning Alliance Platforms will be established as well, with links to the national level LA platform.

In addition, the initiative has been taken up to organize more general pro-poor sector group, focusing on WASH services for the urban poor. The group is organized by the PURC and hosted by the TPP project.

Other Projects using the Learning Alliance Approach in Ghana

Besides the TPP project, there are a number of other projects and programmes in Ghana which have adopted a Learning Alliance strategy. These include the SWITCH project and the WASHCost project.

The **SWITCH project** focuses on Integrated Urban Water Management in the city of Accra. The Learning Alliance approach within this project started in February 2007, with the First SWITCH Accra Stakeholder meeting. Since then, SWITCH city and national level stakeholders have been meeting in thematic workshops (around natural systems, urban agriculture, etc.) and in strategic planning workshops in which stakeholders give their input to the development of a strategic plan for Integrated Urban Water Management in Accra. During the 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 can thus be perceived as a mix of city and national level stakeholders, regularly coming together in a “general assembly”, where research findings are presented and a strategic plan for the city is developed. In addition, stakeholders come together in “thematic working groups” to learn and work more in depth on certain themes.

The **WASHCost Project** is an action research project that intends to identify and analyze unit costs and how these can be used to improve planning and governance of WASH services. The current Learning Alliance consists of a group of national level stakeholders. The Learning Alliance process is facilitated by a Learning Alliance facilitator. Learning Alliance members have been able to profit from a series of trainings offered by the project consortium members KNUST and IRC. In addition to the national level, WASHCOST works in a number of regions and districts. In these regions and districts, Regional Level and District Level Learning Alliances will be established, which will feed into the national level platform.

WASH Sector National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP)

Because of the similarities in the approach and overlap of involved stakeholders, the above mentioned projects decided in May 2009 it would be good to come to the development of one single sector level National Learning Alliance Platform, rather than a number of project based platforms. It was agreed that the National Level Platform should be organised by the National Knowledge Management Coordinator of the WASH Sector Resource Centre Network Secretariat, in collaboration with the project level Learning Alliance Facilitators. The Resource Centre Network is a network of organizations, institutions 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. Besides the National Level Learning Alliance, smaller, more focussed project specific working groups would continue under the different projects. Lessons and experiences from local level will feed into the National Level Learning Alliance Platform through the Local Level learning Alliances of the different projects. The figure below gives a schematic overview of the different platforms and how they expect to relate to each other.

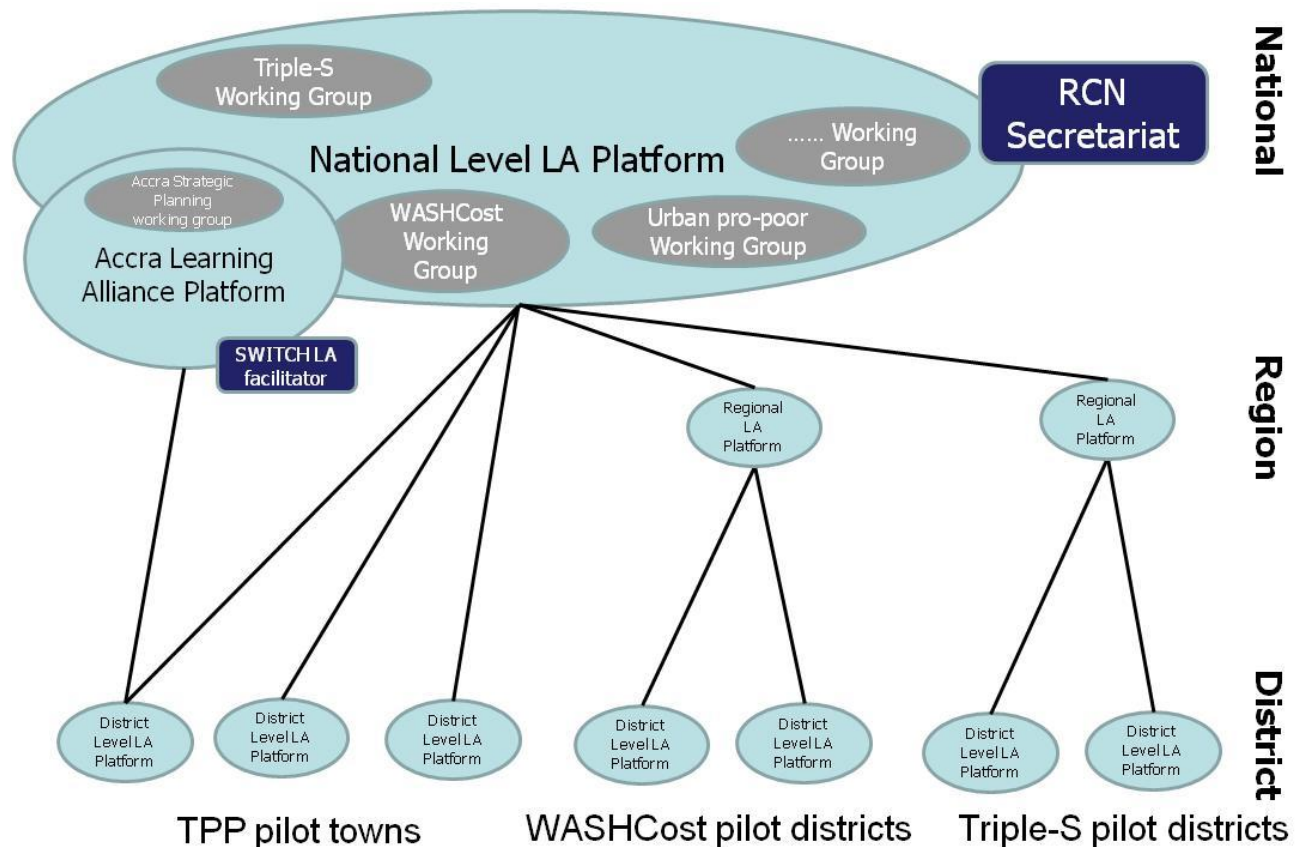


Figure 2: Learning Alliance platforms in Ghana

The NLLA was launched in October 2009 and has since been held monthly under the banner of the Sector Resource Centre Network in collaboration with the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing (MWRWH). The TPP project, through the platform is able to reach out to the wider sector stakeholders to raise the profile and understanding of the project objectives. It also gives TPP a platform to present and discuss findings and lessons learnt on providing WASH services to the urban poor. With this method and in collaboration with the other projects, we are moving closer to achieving the vision of a knowledge-driven sector, providing improved and sustainable pro-poor WASH services.