

## **Resource centres set the tone for learning in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector**

*Ewen Le Borgne, Carlos Talavera, Aleida Martinez, Gerardo Martinez, Gustavo Heredia, Erma Uytewaal.*

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sector (WASH), has been guilty of reinventing the water pump on a regular basis. *Non-learning* organisations and – paradoxically – networks are sadly a common phenomenon in the WASH sector. This is also true in Latin America.

To put an end to this cycle of lessons unlearned, a group of Latin American and international organizations started two years ago to pull resources so as to establish Resource centres in Central and South America. Honduras is leading the way and there are hopes to expand to five more countries.

The advent of resource centres in the region has been accompanied by the recognition by some sector organizations of the importance of joint learning and knowledge management in the region. Knowledge management supports complex processes of change and efforts to constantly adjust the quality of water and sanitation service delivery based on each other's experiences. These organisations now have to develop relevant learning and sharing mechanisms.

It remains to be seen if these mechanisms are indeed appropriate for the Latin American WASH sector and its complex dynamics – and if so, to what extent the resource centre movement is genuinely steered by local actors – arguably a better guarantee for sustainability.

### **The Latin American WASH sector**

Latin America is doing relatively well in terms of water and sanitation coverage, certainly compared with Africa overall and with the large pockets of unserved populations in Asia<sup>1</sup>. At any rate there is reasonable hope for many countries in the region to reach the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation.

But generous figures hide a more taxing situation as regards equity, sustainability (based on quality and reliability of WASH facilities) and coordination. The complexity and diversity of WASH sector stakeholders and the recent decentralisation spice up the challenge.

### **Equity, sustainability, coordination: the Bermuda triangle for the Latin American WASH sector**

Equal access to basic services, including water and sanitation, is largely unbalanced in the region. The gap between rich urban citizens and poor rural, indigenous and afro-latino populations is very high: between rural and urban, the gap is of 23% coverage for water and 37% for sanitation (Water and Sanitation Program 2007). The disparities between Afro-Latin/indigenous and other groups are in the order of 10-20% coverage (World Bank). Reducing such inequity and empowering deprived groups are high priorities in the Latin American WASH sector.

The sustainability and quality of water and sanitation facilities is another major concern: Coverage rates might be high, but WASH facilities do not last because of the scarcity of capable, mandated actors to take care of operation and maintenance and to ensure the quality of drinking water.

The last side of the triangle is completed with the isolation of the WASH sector from related water uses (for irrigation, water resource management) or sectors (agriculture, energy), leading to absurd situations where WASH policies may jeopardise other links in the development chain e.g. putting emphasis on drinking water to the detriment of agriculture or education. Lateral thinking, integration and coordination of actors and sectors are vital to overcome WASH sector challenges and to guarantee more sustainable development.

### **A complex galaxy of actors changing their course of action**

The WASH sector comprises countless types of stakeholders: public legislators, implementers and regulators, private entrepreneurs providing supplies and advice, community-based and national civil society organisations, donors, and so forth. All have a say in the delivery of WASH services but more often than not they fail to coordinate attention and efforts.

Inherent complexities to the WASH sector are now amplified by the decentralisation trend: local government is now officially in charge of bringing services closer to the people. This is a new role and local authorities could do with more capacities (technical know-how, staff and financial resources) to assume their responsibilities at the expected standards. Central government does not always provide adequate technical and financial support. In particular local government staff requires basic information, guidance, training to operate WASH facilities well. Other stakeholders need up-to-date, relevant information. A major governance challenge involves cooperation and alliance forming between all stakeholders.

An example of this kind of alliance occurred late 2005, when a few organisations came together and devised a plan to establish resource centres and provide a fertile learning environment for WASH local governance in Latin America.

### **Box 1: Resource centres**

#### **What are resource centres?** (Lieshout 2004)

A resource centre is an organisation or a network of organisations that provides independent support services (to a sector), making knowledge available to various target groups in a format they can use and tailored to their specific information needs.

Resource centres, sometimes referred to as reference centres, knowledge centres, or centres of excellence, are not mere libraries or documentation centres. They address the need for knowledge and information on all aspects of a sector in a number of possible ways: training, documentation centre, question and answer service, awareness-raising events, blue pages, websites, newsletters, consultancies etc.

Resource centres may take on various roles:

- Knowledge generators: developing concepts through (action-) research;
- Information brokers: collecting and analysing local and international field practices and experiences, packaging and disseminating information through newsletters, publications, technical papers;
- Connectors: providing / facilitating forums to share knowledge and information among sector stakeholders;
- Facilitators: their independent role allows them to facilitate multi-stakeholder events and processes;
- Capacity developers and advisors: training, developing competencies of various stakeholders in regular training courses, in joint projects, through question and answer services / helpdesk etc.
- Advocates: lobbying for, and promoting, sector development;
- Consultants: selling their (products and) services and turning in proposals to generate their own funding. Although self-sufficiency is essential to resource centres, consultancies have not been retained as a desired function in Latin America.

Knowledge management and learning are central to resource centres, in order to maintain the memory of the sector and to enable adaptive management. Resource Centres have to manage information very well, and to establish contact with other actors to train, inform, advocate to or advise them. Resource Centres are independent information brokers that use their connections and experiences to improve the performances of a sector through its individual actors (whether persons, organisations or networks).

Resource centres often operate in networks and may share functions among their member organisations. The coordination of networks depends on an effective exchange among members; their survival depends on their ability to learn, coordinate ideas, capacities and funds to adapt to new challenges.

### **The dawn of resource centres in the region?**

In November 2005, a group of about 40 professionals representing 34 institutions from nine Latin American countries<sup>2</sup> attended a workshop in Cali, Colombia. The group comprised representatives from governmental agencies, the private sector, local and international NGOs. Their ambition was to collectively implement some functions of resource centres in their country to respond to the governance challenge and thereby enhance access of deprived populations to decent WASH services.

The expertise with resource centres at that point was mostly coming from IRC's five-year Resource Centre Development (RCD18) programme to develop resource centres in over 18 countries. Next to IRC [[www.irc.nl](http://www.irc.nl)], the Colombian institute CINARA [<http://cinara.univalle.edu.co>], two key staff from the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme [WSP – [www.wsp.org](http://www.wsp.org)] and SNV [the Dutch Development Organisation - <http://www.snvworld.org/public>] had been highly involved in RCD18. From that experience, all four organisations knew that there was demand for resource

centre functions in the region. The paramount lesson from RCD18 was generating local buy-in for sector learning before undertaking anything new.

In the Cali workshop, the most appropriate RC functions were identified:

- Generating and disseminating useful information and knowledge;
- Contributing to capacity development of local and national stakeholders;
- Advocacy (for integrated water resource management);
- Mobilizing human and economic resources.

Further, the importance of networks was recognized, to achieve synergies and distribute RC functions. Participants agreed to adapt their work to fit local singularities, and to generally promote knowledge sharing.

Finally, the group agreed to design national action plans for six of the countries<sup>3</sup> and to establish a multi-stakeholder support group coined *Grupo de Promoción y Soporte* (GPS) which would directly assist one country from South America and one from Central America. As regional learning catalyst, the GPS was devised to help apply the concept by sharing concrete RC examples from other countries, link up networks in South and Central America, provide thematic support and generally help coordinate the RC networks. A daunting task at a time when most Latin American organisations did not fathom the concept of resource centres, let alone feel confident in setting RC functions up.

### **National resource centres in the making**

The successful Colombian workshop raised expectations: The GPS would have to help shape up RC functions not only at national but also at local level, where WASH service delivery happens. The movement could only prove its worth if district level resource centre functions successfully served local stakeholders.

In response, the GPS members agreed to five main functions. First, to identify and document relevant previous experiences where information / knowledge played a key role in implementation projects, such as the RC experience of Cinara, Colombia, the Sanbasur project, Peru [<http://www.sanbasur.org.pe>] and the RAS-HON network, Honduras<sup>4</sup>. The study would provide practical examples to locally adapt the concept of resource centre. Second, they agreed to form alliances with international agencies and other regional WASH networks, in particular FOCARD, a governmental network in Central America and RRASCA<sup>5</sup>, a Central American network of WASH networks. The third function comprised an assessment of the supply and demand of information in the participating countries, in order to analyze the potential for resource centres. Fourth, they aimed to use virtual media to stimulate network communication. Last, the members devised country action plans to develop RC functions. Honduras and Peru were identified as priority countries for 2006.

A regional learning movement was in motion: local ownership was starting to feed a local vision, and a support structure (the GPS) was in place to provide advice and stimulate regional learning. In the logic, the forthcoming country initiatives would guarantee internal sharing and learning mechanisms and the development of useful products and services. A learning and sharing culture would ensue.

In reality, however, the movement came to its first disillusion: Peru never saw a strong local organisation leading the movement; Bolivia started off with a committed core group but slowed down due to constant changes in the ministerial team; Nicaragua followed a better track with a push from two strong development agencies, but the advent of national elections brought the situation to a standstill for most of 2006. Other countries watched the train pass.

In Honduras, however, a core group showed strong commitment to the resource centre movement and developed a detailed country programme, including local activities in the Atlantic region.

### **Joining the dots in Honduras: resource centres on their way**

The Honduran Resource Centre group<sup>6</sup> included 15 members from public, private and civil society organisations, all part of RAS-HON. The latter was well connected and, very conveniently, its mandate was to disseminate best practices in the WASH sector. It was the ideal network to lead the resource centre movement in Honduras. In spite of its mandate, RAS-HON had never defined a clear strategic approach on WASH sector learning. The resource centre idea seemed like a perfect missing link.

#### **Local actors in charge: generating ownership and commitment**

The resource centre concept seemed very theoretical to the Honduran organisations involved; it was essential to adapt the concept to generate local ownership. As its first concrete activity, the working group thus selected one of its members (from SNV) to write a conceptual document on the form and function of a potential resource centre initiative in Honduras. This document rallied the group behind their national RC initiative.

In a series of workshops, the Honduran working group refined the vision of the concept of resource centre and developed a national action plan aiming at:

- Establishing connections between all actors of the WASH sector, among others using digital communication platforms;
- Creating, adapting, repackaging, disseminating knowledge that is useful for WASH sector stakeholders to better assume their functions;
- Generating lessons learnt from key positive or negative experiences or work processes and making them available to all stakeholders; and
- Developing capacity of various WASH actors, in particular technical agents of municipalities.

#### **Developing capacities for sector learning**

The *Grupo de Promoción y Soporte* was hard pressed to sustain the Honduran initiative. Therefore a dedicated staff member took the leadership of the Honduras working group, rallying support from WSP, SNV and IRC, and focusing on information and knowledge management and resource centre development in the country, as well as providing thematic support was provided on specific water-related

areas such as multiple uses of water, mitigating natural disasters and generally working on local governance.

WASH thematic programmes were the central concern for the core group; KM was just a means to improve WASH facilities and their governance on the ground. But it was yet too early to focus on implementation of thematic programmes. For now, the GPS priority was to enable the RC group to better handle knowledge management. To start with, they provided on-demand feedback to the conceptual document and the action plan to help establish a coherent and realistic line on sector learning in Honduras.

In March 2007, RAS-HON, WSP, SNV and IRC organised a three-day workshop on knowledge management with 30 representatives from national and Atlantic region organisations. Building on existing IRC KM training courses (Pels and Odhiambo 2005), the workshop introduced participants to the concepts of knowledge management, and tools (action review, knowledge mapping and peer assists) that could prove useful for resource centre development. The workshop also introduced the concept of 'sistematización' – how to turn project experience and lessons into practical knowledge that can be shared with and applied by other organisations. The results were mixed: participants felt they had been exposed to too little theory to turn the concepts into practice, but they had learned about useful group work tools and some of them reintroduced these to their colleagues.

To further equip the Honduran core group, four Hondurans participated in a workshop on process documentation, an approach to document the underlying factors and happenings that make or break a project or programme, which and are usually not addressed in a logical framework. This was aimed at stimulating a culture of double loop learning (Argyris and Schön 1974), based on regular reflection and documentation. Upon their return, the participants planned a similar workshop in their home context, in order to further share their learning.

### **Getting a grip on internal learning and sharing**

The Resource Centre group in Honduras has a number of sharing tools at its disposal including a website, a national newsletter with regional versions (including the Atlantic Region), and various national workshops, organised to discuss sector modernisation and the challenges of decentralisation for WASH service delivery. Through these tools, information, resources and lessons are shared, allowing a diverse public to keep informed of the network activities, and momentum to be maintained. With capacities and structures in place, all that was left to do was to start developing products and services.

### **First resource centre activities**

One of the key principles of resource centre work is to respond to existing demands. The Honduran group thus commissioned a study to assess information demand and needs of each key WASH sector organisation to identify which organisations might like to join the RC movement, what information they could provide, and generally what kind of information they were after. The group first carried out such an assessment in the Atlantic region, in the form of a survey sent to 58 organisations

mostly based in the municipality of La Ceiba, including local water committees, NGOs, municipalities and other institutions<sup>7</sup>. The Atlantic region was becoming a key part of the RC movement in Honduras.

#### *Learning in the Atlantic*

Soon in the process, a number of Honduran members brought forth the idea of bringing resource centres to the district level, as a step to more sustainability. This tied in well with a large investment programme supported by CARE to promote technologies such as multi-stage filtration of water and use of ferrocements in treatment plants which was just about to start in the Atlantic region. A prerequisite of this third phase was to let local organisations manage the project, CARE acting only as advisor. The RC was able to pitch in by recording community feedback so as to improve the project technologies, transfer technological know-how to communities and provide long term training and advisory guidance to local WASH stakeholders. With a diverse group of stakeholders comprising the municipality, the university and various development organizations, joint planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring of a water treatment plant were implemented.

Exchange of information between individual organisations of the group was already happening, albeit rather haphazardly. The working group decided to meet more frequently, use the regional newsletter more systematically as an information dissemination mechanism, and to share information on a regular basis with local partner agencies.

All in all, the Honduras RC initiative was well ahead: a proposal on the structure and functions was in preparation, fund-raising had started on the right track and the analysis of knowledge and information supply and demand was undertaken at a regional level. The gamble for the GPS and other advocates of resource centres was to share results from Honduras with other national initiatives from the Latin American RC movement – the key to the long term success and recognition of resource centres.

## **Connecting lines in the region: a learning alliance of resource centres?**

### **The unequal patchwork of resource centre initiatives**

In the meantime, results varied in the other participating countries. In Nicaragua, a local network organization was promoting sector learning, with workshops hosted, a working group established and pilot events planned. Although national elections halted progress, demanding the attention of major political actors and large international NGOs and donor organisations, it is expected that the process will be revitalized in the context of the international year of sanitation (2008) and the national process of promoting integrated environmental sanitation.

In Bolivia, a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder working group on resource centres, established a promising vision and strategy. Activities were planned along three main directives: to investigate training demands in the WASH sector; to implement a small resource centre, with technical assistance, specialised in supporting small scale water suppliers; and to support a national plan (a government project) for the creation and support of a national network of resource centres. Results have been mixed: the RC group is carrying out training activities on demand and the pilot RC is functioning. However, the project on the national network of RCs has been reformulated by the government and as of today there is no clear strategy.

In Peru, despite initial momentum, the working group quickly died out and no donor showed interest in supporting the pilot project. Overall, the time was not yet deemed ripe for resource centres, although a future potential cooperation with national universities to consolidate Knowledge Management in the WASH sector has been identified. In Guatemala, the regional WASH network failed to devise a national action plan but stayed in the loop by sending a representative to the KM workshop in Honduras, and by regularly attending the regular networking meetings. And in Ecuador, interest from organisations was monitored around different projects, but so far has not led to any concrete action plan.

All in all, the *Grupo de Promoción* would have to make do with these unequal results and keep promoting integration of the national initiatives at regional level.

At a worldwide level, the GPS has been keeping busy. To keep the movement going, GPS members have used their connections among governments and donors: earmarking funds to organize activities, and securing additional funding from the Canadian, Swiss, Spanish development cooperation agencies as well as from the European Commission. Besides fundraising, digitization of RC experiences has led to the establishment of a dedicated intranet to publish information about the initiative, and a Google Group to allow actors to connect and discuss relevant issues. Face to face exchange has taken place during regional events and workshops, enabling learning and knowledge sharing between WASH networks and organizations.

While all these efforts do not form a very coherent body as yet, the RC movement is still very much 'work in progress', with some promising, initial results beginning to manifest themselves.



## **Where is the regional WASH learning movement?**

Although the RC movement in Latin America started about two years ago, structured learning in the WASH sector is just at its dawn. Past experiences show that resource centres do not appear overnight. Achieving multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination takes a great deal of time to shape up, to create common understanding and to develop joint products and services.

In this respect, what are the key lessons learnt and insights from the RC movement?

### *Local ownership and commitment towards a shared vision*

The experiment confirms that local ownership is the starting point for any project to succeed. Particularly the work done by the RC group in Honduras to contextualise resource centres and create a common vision has proven an effective approach to generating buy-in. The concept of resource centres is now familiar to most local WASH actors convened in the RASHON network, as well as to various political actors<sup>8</sup>.

Further, the issue of ownership rests on the existence of local champions leading the work. For instance, the CEPIS-OPS representative leading the movement in Honduras has helped gather a working group. He has now retired and some core group participants say they are feeling the momentum slow down.

Strong ownership has led to financial commitment: CARE has provided a venue for the Atlantic region office; a local Ministry of the university have both dedicated one half-time staff on the RC initiative; SDC has been funding participation to workshops and SNV has supported 20 days of coordination around a sanitation case study. These accomplishments are all the more amazing as – according to one CARE representative, ‘most people did not even understand the concept of resource centre at first.’

### *Support structures*

GPS members are strongly committed to the project’s success. Bi-yearly meetings and regular discussions with national working groups keep the GPS and national action plans going. However, GPS organisations face important capacity development needs in the organisations involved and some are facing reorganizations; this may destabilize the support structures. New members are joining the GPS, ensuring continued support to the network.

### *Learning and sharing mechanisms*

The poor use of learning and sharing mechanisms is certainly one of the most disappointing features of the RC movement. There are reasons for this poor result: the regional group is fairly heterogeneous, not everybody knows each other and more direct contact is probably required to create trust and allow a genuine exchange on the digital platforms available.

Overall, the use of digital platforms has not proven effective so far: the discussion groups for Honduras, Bolivia and the region at large do not count many registered members, nor are they very active. Very few members are sufficiently confident in their use of the platform and Internet, and apparently do not prioritise knowledge exchange. It is also unclear whether the group work exercises from the KM workshop are indeed applied. However, regular face-to-face meetings in Honduras and Nicaragua have proven crucial to maintain the momentum and to continue building a common vision, and the Honduras Google group, is well used. Plans to create a genuine learning alliance combining actors from grassroots to national level will build upon these successes.

#### *Development of products and services*

The development of products and services is crucial to maintain the momentum. Some actors in Honduras indicated they were losing interest in the process because the movement was not coming up with concrete results on the ground. In this respect, the strategy chosen by the resource centre movement is still very much top-down and does not address local needs sufficiently.

However, joint projects, such as the one undertaken with CARE, have proven useful vehicles for the introduction of RCs; indeed the group is already planning to start another project on Integrated Water Resource Management supported by the local RC. Other promising developments display improved information management: RAS-HON and Agua Tuya websites are up-to-date and well-used, even inspiring the departmental committee for basic services in Cochabamba to develop a similar website.

#### *Changing practices*

The general vision about sharing resources and ideas to improve sector learning is still very much on the agenda of the organisations that showed initial interest. But is the theory in use following the espoused theory (Argyris and Schön 1974), in other words, is learning truly institutionalized? It is still too early to draw conclusions about the use of documentation and information sharing in organizations' daily reality, but the poor use of discussion groups, and the eternal reliance on face-to-face contact is not altogether encouraging.

### **Wobbly cobbles on the road to effective resource centres**

Given the status of the regional learning movement, the organizations defending the value of resource centre functions face the following challenges in the months and years to come:

- More effort needs to go into promoting the use of *exchange platforms*, training staff and appointing people in charge of these platforms. The GPS in particular – being the advocate for regional exchange – needs to commit more time and to convince national organizations to dedicate staff time to manage these platforms and embed them in a regular sharing practice.

- More *time* needs to be invested in sharing, reviewing work, documenting lessons learnt, and showing the benefits of the RC approach to others. This is probably the tipping point that the RC movement is mainly struggling with to upscale its efforts.
- The complex cultural issues of KM are likely to cause dilemmas in the future as traditional *power structures* are challenged by the distribution of authority and responsibility. The further the RC movement goes in including grassroots stakeholders, the more it will have to confront this reality.
- *KM capacities* need to be fostered among local actors. After focusing on rallying champions at national level, the RC movement has to show its value on the ground through better coordinated organizations.
- RC groups need to show their value by offering *products and services* that are seen to be relevant to external audiences. They have to quickly show how internal knowledge management has allowed them to be more effective. This is the only way to garner more national support and – from the GPS perspective – to entice other organizations and other countries to follow the RC movement. This calls for a rapid information dissemination by the GPS on the positive aspects of resource centres.
- All organizations from the movement will have to convince donors of the *importance of learning*. Without funding for learning, reflection and (particularly face-to-face) sharing, the organizations' staff may never take the time to improve knowledge management and provide room for sector learning.
- In Honduras and in the other five countries, the actors will have to *tailor their strategy* and consider the above points as and when relevant, according to their needs. The movement is about ongoing learning and adaptive management, so there is the risk of the blueprint approach, especially for the many that are facing knowledge management and resource centre development for the first time.
- A strategy is still needed to face *strong national political interferences* as well as other political changes in the WASH sector. For instance, SNV is withdrawing from the sector in Latin America. If other actors go through similar turbulence, the heart of the movement might be at risk.

## Conclusion

The WASH RC movement in Latin America is in its infancy: in most countries, resource centres are a plan rather than a daily reality. There is not yet a consistent body of evidence that sector learning is shaping up, in spite of the commitment of a number of important WASH organisations in the region to coordinate sector learning. However, national stakeholders and GPS members are in touch and ready to resume RC activities as soon as National politics allows it, which holds promise for the programme to succeed.

The organisations involved have the great challenge to institutionalise learning practices and to continue committing resources and efforts in the long term. This is by no means an easy task, with changing donor agendas and national political interferences around the sensitive issue of water resources.

With its current levels of investment and support, the RC movement is unlikely to scale up quickly. The question remains whether the movement will manage to involve enough organizations, generate enough commitment and create relevant products before its initial energy erodes.

The resource centre movement in Latin America is a learning experiment for the development sector at large. Will it lead to genuine sector learning? Where will it help local actors most effectively, if at all? What will happen once the Support Group disappears or occupies the back seat? These are a few crucial questions facing WASH sector stakeholders in Latin America and perhaps in other parts of the world – if the suggestion proves true, that Latin America offers insights about potential future development sector policies in other continents.

### References

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1974). *Theory in practice: increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Lieshout R. (2004) *Making it work* <http://www.irc.nl/page/16508>

Pels, J. & Odhiambo F. (2005) Design of and practical experiences with the Learn@WELL knowledge management module, *KM4D Journal* Vol. 1(2): 4-18  
<http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/20/16>

Talavera-Williams, C. (2006) *El Centro Hondureño de Recursos de Conocimiento e Información en Agua y Saneamiento* <http://groups.google.com/group/creas?lnk=iggc>. Reserved for members.

Various GPS meeting reports (2005-2007) Not publicly available.

Various IRC staff members (2005-2007) Travel reports IRC. Not publicly available.

Water and Sanitation Program (2007)  
<http://www.wsp.org/regions/thematicFocus.asp?rid=3&tid=6>

World Bank (2007)  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,contentMDK:20384897~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258554,00.html>

### Abstract

A group of organisations from the WASH sector in Latin America has set an ambitious regional programme to address sector learning in six countries of the Central and Southern American regions. Originally stemming from a regional alliance, the initiative has quickly developed into a multi-stakeholder and multi-level platform of dialogue and action, supported by knowledge management, knowledge sharing, improved documentation and joint learning in action research projects. The programme addresses local governance of water and sanitation facilities, from a

sustainable resource management perspective. It builds upon a South-North participation of governmental bodies (at national and local levels), the civil society and technical partners and donors and has for the first time set knowledge management and sector learning at its cornerstone.

The initiative involves general coordination, exchange and consolidation at regional level, and is fed by a country programme in Honduras which involves many key local and global organisations, to establish resource centres at national level and in the Atlantic region. It is hoped that these efforts will lead to a locally-owned and developing alliance of organisations to improve learning and facilitate actions of all stakeholders in the sector. This article addresses the mechanisms used, introduces the first outcomes and highlights the key challenges lying ahead.

### **About the authors**

*Ewen Le Borgne* is project officer at the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre. He is working on knowledge management and resource centre development in francophone West Africa and Latin America. In West Africa, he has been supporting local partners CREPA for five years in resource centre development and knowledge management and in Latin America he has been supporting the establishment of digital exchange platforms and providing training on knowledge management to groups in Honduras and Nicaragua.

E-mail: [Leborgne@irc.nl](mailto:Leborgne@irc.nl)

*Carlos Talavera Williams* is an independent consultant, formerly working for SNV. He wrote the conceptual paper for the Honduras Resource Centre working group and coordinated activities of the group for four months. Now that he is independent, he is focusing on the development of innovative technologies of water treatment, KM for the micro and small scale enterprise rural and urban sector, and supporting the Resource Centre initiative in Honduras by developing the organization and functions proposal document.

E-mail: [contecnica@cablecolor.hn](mailto:contecnica@cablecolor.hn)

*Aleida Martinez* is working for the Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social, a Honduran government-backed organisation dealing with social initiatives for deprived groups. Aleida is part of the core Resource Centre working group and has been in charge of the process documentation strategy for the group.

E-mail: [Amartinez@fhis.hn](mailto:Amartinez@fhis.hn)

*Gerardo Martinez* is working for CARE in Honduras where he is coordinating activities in the water sector, including in the litoral Atlántico. Gerardo has been pushing for the local establishment of local resource centre functions in La Ceiba and is a core group member at national level.

E-mail: [Gerardo.martinez@ca.care.org](mailto:Gerardo.martinez@ca.care.org)

*Gustavo Heredia* is the director of The Agua Tuya Program [<http://aguatuya.com>], a private programme that provides support and resources to decentralized water networks in peri-urban areas. Gustavo is part of the working group on resource

centres in Bolivia and has been promoting the digital exchange platform in the group.  
E-mail: [gustavoh@aguatuya.com](mailto:gustavoh@aguatuya.com)

*Erma Uytewaal* is coordinating the regional programme of IRC in Latin America and has been the main architect of the Resource Centre movement in Latin America from IRC. She is also coordinating the work of the GPS and encouraging more organisations to support the movement at national as well as at local level.  
E-mail: [Uytewaal@irc.nl](mailto:Uytewaal@irc.nl)

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme: <http://www.wssinfo.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru

<sup>3</sup> Mexico and Brazil were transition economies and had only one representative at the workshop.

Colombia already had an established ResourceCentre: CINARA.

<sup>4</sup> RAS-HON [Red de Agua y Saneamiento de Honduras, [www.rashon.org.hn](http://www.rashon.org.hn)] is a national coordination network of over 70 WASH organisations (non-governmental and governmental), including key national WASH entities such as the Minister for the social investment fund, the vice minister for Health and the General Manager for SANAA, the national water service provider.

<sup>5</sup> RRAS-CA [Red de Redes de Agua y Saneamiento – Centro América, [www.rrasca.org](http://www.rrasca.org)] consists of four national networks of WASH organisations: RAS-GUA in Guatemala, RAS-HON in Honduras, RAS-NIC in Nicaragua and RASES in El Salvador.

<sup>6</sup> The Honduras working group consists of FHIS (Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social, a public entity implementing development projects for the marginalised groups), the University (UNAH), CARE, AHJASA (Asociación Hondureña de Juntas Administradoras de Sistemas de Agua, the Honduran water board association), SANAA (Servicio Nacional de Aguas y Alcantarillas, the national water service provider), SDC, Peace Corps, private consultants and the GPS organisations OPS, SNV and WSP, as well as distant support from IRC.

<sup>7</sup> A similar survey was designed for national level actors but has not been sent to this date.

<sup>8</sup> National political bodies include the Ministry of the Honduran Fund for Social Investment, the ‘Asesor de la Presidencia’, the national water provider (SANAA), the legislative organ of the water sector (CONASA) and the WASH regulatory entity (ERSAPS).