

LEARNING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION

A learning 'sector' is one that engages in continuous learning and reflection and is thus able to adapt to changing circumstances and demands.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR SUSTAINABLE SERVICES AT SCALE?

Building a learning sector with the capacity to continuously innovate, evolve and adapt based on evidence is a must for delivering sustainable services and requires the capacity and willingness to address failure, do things together, better and differently.

Ideally, learning takes place at all levels and brings people together at each level. Alliances can link learning initiatives horizontally and vertically (between districts and national level) to help ensure that lessons from practice feed into policy guidelines and that tools are shared with those responsible for service delivery.

LEARNING ALLIANCES

Learning alliances can help:

- connect research to policies and practice
- scale up innovative approaches
- coordinate responsibility, information and knowledge
- consolidate and disseminate knowledge

The main benefits of learning alliances:

- support for complex problem solving
- harmonising and coordinating sector actors

RESOURCE CENTRES

Resource centres and learning alliances should address real problems that people want to solve and aim to make information available to help individuals and groups address specific needs.

EXAMPLES

In Gujarat, India, **public sector resource centres** at sub-district level support local *panchayats* in all aspects of system management and act as a focal point for knowledge and contacts.

In South Africa, **WIN-SA is a network of organisations that focus on improving knowledge sharing in the water and sanitation sector**, targeting decision makers in government and non-government water services sector.

In Andhra Pradesh (India) and Burkina Faso, **WASHCost learning alliances** bring the findings from research into life-cycle costing for sustainable water and sanitation services in rural and peri-urban areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Incentives: People need incentives to participate. 'Talk shops' will not keep people on board. Learning alliances should be formed around real problems that people want to solve.

Facilitating resource centres and alliances: A good facilitator encourages interaction between formal meetings. Facilitation comes at a cost; some supporting agency has to commit time, money and capacity to the learning processes and the actors in the initiative.

Adapting to local contexts: Resource centres and learning alliances take different forms in different contexts. Key elements include:

- identifying and involving stakeholders – good stakeholder mapping is essential
- a participatory process for developing a shared vision, objectives and activities
- communication channels, process documentation, monitoring and feedback

SELECTED REFERENCES, TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Smits, Stef; Moriarty, Patrick and Sijbesma, Christine (eds) (2007). *Learning alliances : Scaling up innovations in water, sanitation and hygiene*. Delft, The Netherlands, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre.

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