



Collaborative Learning to Support the Delivery of Sustainable WASH Services in Africa

Supporting water sanitation and hygiene services for life

Background

As part of Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership, IRC has committed to supporting solutions and innovations to tackle the complex challenge of sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene provision for all.

A systematic approach to sector change and innovation is needed to support WASH services with government leadership. One strategy towards this goal is to spearhead a collaborative initiative to develop and implement a joint learning agenda among sector professionals and decision makers. A joint learning agenda will tackle common challenges and foreground lessons from innovative approaches to WASH services delivery in African countries.

No one has all the answers and learning initiatives are essential to build knowledge on solutions that work and strengthen capacity to implement them. “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 do things together, better and differently”. This implies a sector with the capacity to continuously monitor its performance, assess progress, and innovate based on lessons learned.

This commitment emanates from IRC’s role in brokering sector knowledge development through numerous in-country and sub-regional learning exchanges, conferences, symposia and seminars in recent years. Interest and demand for these events and exchanges confirm the need for a more coherent and concerted learning programme across the continent.

Objectives

Collaborating in a joint learning initiative will:

- Strengthen the coherence of learning (towards a coherent WASH learning agenda in Africa)
- Reduce duplication of efforts and resources
- Enhance the quality of existing learning events and processes
- Strengthen the policy impact of learning initiatives
- Adopt an approach that builds on synergies and complementary strengths of different partners and contributors

Linkages with AMCOW

AMCOW’s mission is to provide political leadership, policy direction and advocacy in the provision, use and management of water resources for sustainable social and economic development and maintenance of African ecosystems.

AMCOW has prioritised education, knowledge and capacity in its work plan and shown keen interest in the collaborative learning initiative as a means to make efficient use of available sector learning and innovation resources and to enhance the impact of current learning initiatives. AMCOW and IRC have agreed to join efforts in driving this initiative in Africa and to formalise their commitment in an MoU.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between AMCOW and IRC will seek to strengthen policy impact and improve practice through a joint learning initiative and secure AMCOW’s

partnership in resource acquisition to improve sector learning from monitoring and action research in Africa.

Priority areas for collaboration are in keeping with the four sub-themes in theme 7 of AMCOWs work plan:

- Strengthening sector learning e.g. linked to the outcomes of the eThekweni sub regional processes. Adding value to current learning opportunities through a more structured approach towards documenting country experiences and processes and sharing of experiences. Lesson learning to feed into policy formulation processes at country and regional level and improved practices for achieving total coverage and sustained services. Strengthening the sector in African countries to address the challenges in the post- MDG agenda.
- Knowledge management – a (virtual) water and sanitation resource center network enabled by the AMCOW secretariat, bringing together the demand for knowledge and knowledge products by governments and sector players in Africa with existing experiences, and the development of new information and knowledge products or versioning existing products.
- Monitoring and evaluation, including ICT and other harmonized mechanisms and tools to collect monitoring data from member states, and supporting countries to strengthen their capacity to monitor the implementation of regional and global agreements.
- Capacity development – develop a capacity development strategy based on the results of a study on the capacity gap in the sector presently being carried out by GIZ. The strategy will address the need for formal and informal training, formal training to be taken up by centers of excellence, and special attention to be paid to capacity support in the sanitation sub-sector.

IRC's specific strengths include in-country presence, partnerships and activities, and in the design, facilitation and documentation of knowledge products.

To ensure best policy impact, the envisaged joint learning initiative will fall under the auspices of AMCOW and be formally linked to key African learning and decision making platforms such as Africa Water Week and AfricaSan.

A range of potential partners have expressed interest in contributing to the design and implementation of a joint learning agenda and strategy, including ECOWAS, pS-Eau, WSP Burkina, RWSN, GIZ, AfDB, UNICEF-WCARO and WaterAid.

Next steps

- Formalise the AMCOW and IRC partnership (MoU) to spearhead a collaborative learning initiative (expected August 2014).
- Invite and build on feedback and inputs from interested organisations in order agree on strategies and modalities and to detail the design of the initiative. A side session at AfricaSan 4 is envisaged along with other contact moments.
- Launch in the joint learning initiative in 2015.

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