

Process documentation

In the WASHCost project

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1 September 2009

The WASHCost project aims to improve water and sanitation governance at all levels, as decision makers and stakeholders analyse the costs of sustainable, equitable and efficient services and put their knowledge to use. Process documentation plays an important role in documenting the process of collecting, analysing and use of cost data of sustainable and equitable WASH services. Processes are recorded to understand how the project evolves, and to track positive and negative trends, rather than only focusing on the final result.

Concept

The concept of process documentation has been developed in past IRC projects, such as EMPOWERS and WASPA. Process documentation is also part of currently running IRC projects as SWITCH and RiPPLE. It is particularly useful to assess the changes in behaviour of key actors that the project hopes to achieve. These hopes usually form the hypothesis of change of the project – process documentation leans on it. In WASHCost the hypothesis of change is the following: *‘WASH governance will improve at all levels, as decision makers and stakeholders analyse the costs of sustainable, equitable and efficient services and put their knowledge to use.*

Process documentation is about systematically

capturing what happens, helping key actors to reflect on these events and on their relation to the WASHCost hypothesis of change and about organising and disseminating information.

Process documentation in WASHCost has been defined as an approach that tracks events and happenings, discerns underlying reasons and highlights issues that need action.

Priorities

The priorities of process documentation will shift throughout the project as the focus of project activities

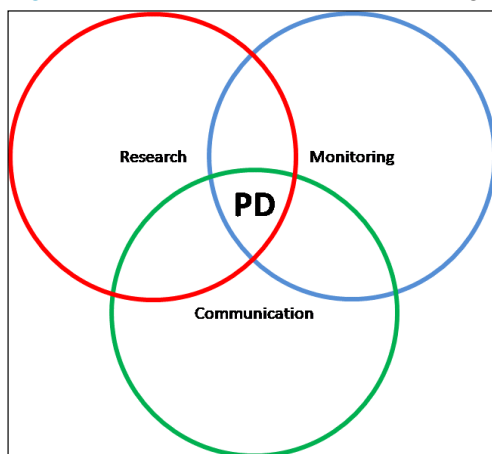
will evolve from initiating the project in country to carrying out research and scaling up. The top priority areas to document for process documentation will be re-assessed each year. For 2009 these priorities to document are:

1. Learning Alliances as vehicles for change
2. Understanding and use of life cycle unit costs
3. Existing research methodology approaches around unit costs.

Benefits of process documentation

Process Documentation is essentially useful to a project team, for a variety of reasons: It supports monitoring, research and communication (see fig. 1). Process documentation is not formally part of monitoring but its insights are used to feed monitoring reports. The learning conveyed through process documentation influences the implementation of the project, particularly as regards the development of the learning alliance and activities of its members. In research activities, process documentation helps to capture stories behind the data and provides key contextual information that makes research locally relevant. At the same time, information that is collected by process documentation work is also re-packaged into communication outputs such as stories, cartoons, briefing notes or as articles and video interviews on the project website.

Figure 1: Process documentation and its linkages



Challenges of Process Documentation

One of the main challenges of process documentation in WASHCost is to what extent a person is able to monitor and critically reflect on progress, when they are part of the project. WASHCost has learnt from previous experiences that process documentation is



Photo credit: Michele Adiei-Fah

not only about highlighting positive results. It is, perhaps more importantly, about learning from what does not go so well and why. It is easier to tell a positive story than to examine problems openly, but it is of little value for a team wishing to 'get it right'. It is therefore essential that process documentation also considers what is not going well and that this analysis is a collective responsibility with strong support from management. Another crucial challenge is to avoid that process documentation be carried out as an entirely separate activity. While requiring some objective distance, process documentation should be supporting project priorities and activities and ultimately the overall hypothesis of change.

Methods

Process documentation makes use of various approaches and tools: classic research methods as questionnaires and surveys but also more journalistic tools such as interviews, photos, cartoons or videos. The information that is collected can be packaged in different formats such as photo stories, video interviews, briefing notes or website articles.

If you want to read more

- Learning alliance briefing No. 6: Process documentation (2007), http://www.switchurbanwater.eu/outputs/pdfs/WP_6-2_BRN_6_Process_documentation.pdf
- The Inside Story: Process Documentation Experiences from EMPOWERS (2007), <http://www.project.empowers.info/page/3287>

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