

Philosophy and Character of Learning Alliance Approaches on WASH Issues in India

A Note from WASHCost India Project

Background:

WASHCost is a five year action research project that aims to develop a framework and tools for understanding the disaggregated costs of providing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene services (WASH) in an equitable and sustainable manner. These costs are related to the life cycle of WASH facilities in rural and peri-urban areas and the project aims to identify the relative magnitude of costs, understand their drivers; improve analysis of the cost of extending services to the poor and benchmark costs to allow comparisons between states and across countries. The project is expected to contribute to the development of decision-support tools and methodologies and tools for estimating, planning and executing WASH services. In Andhra Pradesh where the project is based, the majority of WASH services are provided by government departments, primarily the Department of Rural Water Supply & Sanitation (RWSS) and other ministries and departments, including those for irrigation and groundwater. Other actors such as local governance institutions (e.g. Grama Panchayati); community based organisations (CBOs); non-governmental organisations (NGOs); private companies; academic institutions, media and others also play a critical role. Interacting with all these actors is part of the WASHCost action research and advocacy agenda

The need to embed WASHCost and the life-cycle costs approach:

The WASHCost action research project has several phases, each phase having a specific set of tasks and expected results, from planning research questions, methodology and sampling, to data collection, analysis and dissemination of results. The process of change in the current system of costing WASH services has to be based on evidence from the ground realities and will take time. For WASHCost to influence a wide range of institutions and actors and to influence policy makers during the life of the project and beyond requires the project to be well embedded in the sector, so that the life-cycle costs approach is well understood and reflected in policy making, budgeting and planning. WASHCost is being implemented in one state, albeit that the population of Andhra Pradesh is greater than the other three WASHCost countries combined (Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mozambique). For WASHCost to have its full potential impact it must eventually influence thinking and action throughout India.

How the WASHCost project is embedded in Andhra Pradesh

WASHCost India is embedded in Andhra Pradesh and there is high level of interest in the project and expectations of what will come out of it. Two formal bodies help this process: the WASHCost Advisory Group and the WASHCost Working Group (see Annex 1). These were set up to provide guidance, and to help with integration and embedding and dissemination of results.

The Advisory Group is made up of the highest officials of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department and other departments. It is there to provide guidance and direction particularly to

ensure that the project is aligned with the WASH goals of the state. It will also help with the embedding process and dissemination of the outcomes.

The Advisory Group is important to WASHCost because it opens doors and gives the project legitimacy. However, the group meets only twice a year and is not involved in the day to day activities of the project. Because it is made up of very senior officials its membership can change frequently. The group is chaired by the Principal Secretary of the RWSS Department. The current secretary is the third person to hold that post in the short life of the project.

The Working Group is represented by heads of departments of the various departments, who implement policies and programs. This group is more active, meeting once every month or two months and providing guidance on more detailed matter concerned with the project design and implementation, including the selection criteria and methodologies. The working group will be influential in ensuring that WASH sector line department implement the project outcomes.

NGOs and donors

Both the Advisory Group and the Working Group include NGO representation from the Rural Development Trust (RDT) and WASSAN respectively. However, in Andhra Pradesh the vast majority of implementation projects, even those with outside funding, are done by the Government. Some of the larger NGOs, such as WaterAid, and donors, such as DFID, have their regional offices in other states.

Learning alliances and wider sector learning

WASHCost needs to have a broad influence geographically (a greater area of India) and within the sector (influence more bodies, including donors and NGOs as well as Government departments). The dissemination of research results and discussions about their implications and related issues will need to be far reaching and comprehensive, not limited institutionally or conceptually. This will become particularly urgent in the third year of the project after the collection of data is complete.

A learning alliance can facilitate this change as a multi stakeholder body which can function at various levels (national / state / district / local government level) and create spaces, not only for information exchange, but also to learn from experience and research. Government institutions, local government, donors, NGOs (national and international), CBOs, academic departments of universities resource centres and other sector bodies can take part in this process. The learning spaces in such platforms are facilitated to ensure the greatest possible participation by stakeholders and that real learning takes place. It is possible for such bodies to be formal organisational structures, learning from research, from practical experience from projects and from relevant reports commissioned or published in the sector. The key elements are the openness of the organisation to relevant organisations and institutions, the space for learning and the fact that lessons learnt are taken back into the organisations and influence practice.

Given the circumstances of India – a huge population, a complex web of institutions and actors in the WASH sector, and the fact that there are already many networks and bodies for collaboration and sharing it would seem counter-productive for WASHCost India to seek to establish and facilitate a formal India-wide learning alliance. Even if a relatively small five year project had the authority to convene such a body, it would consume all of the WASHCost resources to sustain it. It seems more cost effective and appropriate for WASHCost to support learning and sharing opportunities as they arise, stimulate discussion within existing networks, and to commission and convene ad hoc working groups or alliances for particular targeted interventions. In this way WASHCost will build and support learning alliance type learning spaces in the sector without a rigid institutional framework. We may consider this as WASHCost contributing to *sector-wide learning*, particularly on issues of cost and sustainability.

A learning approach in the sector

The nature of “learning” and “philosophy of learning” are governed by the following features:

- **Formal and Informal Associations**
- **Multiple Actors and Multiple Platforms**
- **Non-Linear Relationships**

As seen above, action research and the embedding processes require “formal” associations, such as advisory committees, and working groups. A more general learning approach in the sector goes beyond these formal spaces to generate informal associations among actors so that sharing and learning is unhindered and demand based. While formal arrangements give a shape to project related actions, informal arrangements may trigger the process of change in a greater variety of situations. The WASHCost “learning alliance approach” in India will attempt to blend formal and informal associations to enhance partnerships and the learning processes. It would be misleading currently to talk about “members” of a WASHCost learning alliance, but in a mix of formal and informal contacts, such an entity could emerge over the next two to three years. The extent to which actors are considered part of a WASHCost learning alliance would be defined by a variety of parameters such as the nature of their involvement in WASHCost research and advocacy efforts; the benefits they get from joint learning, their contribution and so on.

It is expected that unpredictable forms of associations and partnerships would evolve over a period of time. There is no need to formalise all such occasions/ platforms/ partnerships. Members converge and/or diverge at various stages. The engagement of these members is largely motivated by their perceived benefits from the association and/or their contribution to the learning processes of other members. The WASHCost project triggers learning events and joins efforts made by others.

An example of the former is the workshop held in Hyderabad in June 2009 on slippage. This initiative by WASHCost India and IRC South Asia focused on why habitations that have been

declared “fully covered” (under drinking water supply schemes) slip back to “partially covered” status. The impetus for this investigation came from the frustration within government institutions that they had to continually develop new efforts to provide services in habitations already declared to be fully covered. This relates closely to the underlying logic of the WASHCost research – that without planning and budgeting for sustainability, services deteriorate. This workshop was an example of how WASHCost can create learning opportunities which match the agendas of key players in the WASH sector.

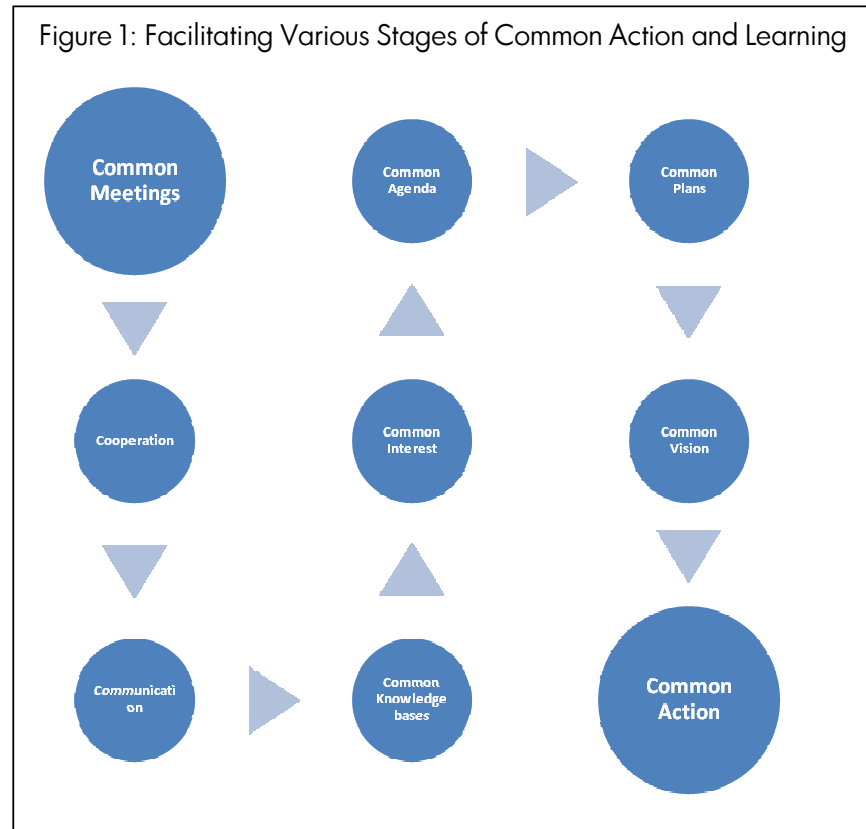
WASHCost may develop ad hoc committees to work on particular initiatives such as finance or advocacy. Non-WASHCost stakeholders would be invited to join such structures, which would essentially be temporary in nature.

On the other hand, WES-Net India is an existing water and sanitation environmental network in the all India context – an alliance of sector stakeholders, including NGOs, UN agencies, private sector, consultants, government departments and donors. It overtly sees itself as a learning alliance. Its objective is to improve knowledge sharing and co-ordination within the water and sanitation sector. WES-Net disseminates information, through its newsletter and website, sectoral meetings and e-conferences, as well as through an e-mail based question and answer service. Although WES-Net is only six years old it has 1,641 members (individuals and institutions), across the country. Clearly WASHCost will be working with and through WES-Net to engage with stakeholders on issues concerning cost, quality and sustainability of services.

In this process, the nature of association is likely to be informal in most cases. As an association matures, there is a potential for developing formal institutional arrangements such as working groups, so on, for strengthening partnerships.

The WASH sector in India has multiple actors operating at various levels and performing multiple roles. Some are field level functionaries, while others work on policy formulation. It is important to create or nurture various types of platforms so that these members can network with each other over time (Figure 1). While WASHCost will work with existing WASH networks these platforms are not necessarily focused on “life cycle costs”. WASHCost India therefore intends to facilitate the creation of both informal and formal learning. The basic function of both is to facilitate interactions, sharing and learning and to develop common interests and action plans among members. Relationships may grow from participation in common meetings to evolving a common vision over time. The nature of relationships among the members, would be expected to change over a period

Relationships between/ among members in WASH sector is not hierarchical or uniform, but non-linear, with a completely unpredictable logic. The exchange of experiences/ insights has to be non-hierarchical and non-threatening.



Objectives of a learning alliance approach

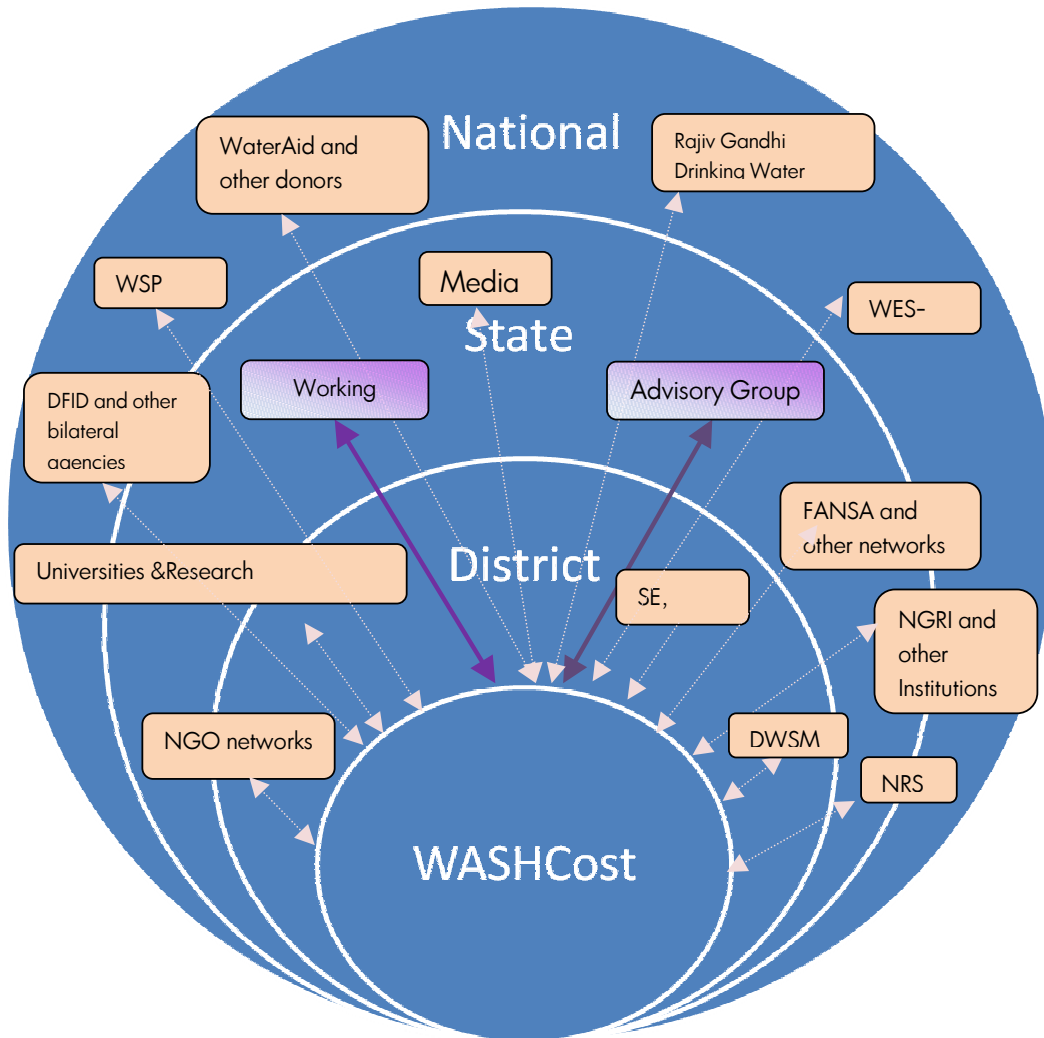
The broad objectives of a learning alliance approach (whether through formal bodies or informal networks) are the following





1. Facilitate the process of evolving common interest and action among various members with respect to various dimensions of WASH sector including various costs of providing sustainable and equitable WASH service delivery
2. Function as a platform for advocacy, innovation and change in WASH sector

Figure 2 represents the learning alliance approach. The names of members (individuals/ institutions/ organizations) are indicative, since the role and objectives of a learning alliance (whether formal or non formal) will change over time. People and organisations may feel that evolving objectives are no longer of interest to them or that the benefits of being involved in the

action research no longer justify the effort and resources. In the case of WASHCost, it is likely that the people and organisations involved in the learning alliance and the nature of relationships will change as the emphasis of the project shifts from research to embedding.

Figure 2: The learning alliance approach



	Different players in WASH Sector and Informal Members of Learning Alliance
	Formal groups in WASHCost project context representing different WASH sector agencies
	Formal linkages
	Informal linkages

The visual should not be read as implying that WASHCost is at the centre of a network of these organisations. Most linkages are informal and from the point of view of any partner institution, WASHCost is to some extent on their periphery. WASHCost sees this relationship as being about extending spheres of influence or involvement. However, Figure 2 does illustrate that WASHCost seeks to increase learning environments with organisations and institutions at district, state and national level.

The WASHCost India team has a responsibility to facilitate the formal and informal interactions on topics of interest to the project at least in the initial stages. It is likely that the members would steer the direction over a period of time, depending on the emerging needs and learning opportunities in the associations. WASHCost India team understands that as roles evolve the shape of the institutional map will also change. WASHCost documentation and the monitoring and learning process will track changing relationships and states of knowledge with significant networks and partners.

The details of formal institutions such as Working Group and Advisory Group are given in Annex 1. A brief description of some of the partners in a potential learning alliance is also given in Annex No 1.

Working Group	Advisory Group
Represented by second level officials of the department who implement policy decisions <i>apart from NGOs</i>	<i>Represented by highest officials of the department who responsible for making policy decisions apart from NGOs</i>
<p>Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide guidance in the overall project design and implementation in line with the Departmental agenda related to Water Supply, Sanitation & Hygiene. • To promote effective integration among various line Departments. • To provide guidance in developing selection criteria, methodologies for undertaking surveys on existing WASHCost services to understand the processes used for decision making across stakeholders, O&M activities and service delivery. • To identify capacity building needs at different levels of the WASH Sector to improve the performance of WASHCost services. • To ensure utilization of outcomes of the WASHCost project in WASH Sector implementation by the line Departments. • To provide guidance in developing appropriate MIS that will be useful for ensuring effective O&M at different levels. 	<p>Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide necessary guidance and direction to ensure that the project helps to realize Water supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector goals of the state. • To promote dissemination of research findings, innovations and tools developed to wider groups of stakeholders. • To facilitate interaction between WASHCost Project and line Departments. • To influence the process of embedding the policy implications in the sectoral programmes and incorporation in to the Departmental Programmes.
<p>Chairman: Research Director (Prof, V. Ratna Reddy, LNRMI)</p> <p>Members Team Leader, WASSAN Chief Engineer, PHED Chief Engineer, RWSS Chief Engineer, Tribal Welfare Chief Engineer, CCD (RWSS) & World Bank Project Director, SWSM Additional Commissioner (Watersheds) Director, SGWD State Project Director, School Education Additional Secretary, Housing Corporation Regional Director, CGWB</p> <p>Member Convener Country Coordinator (WASHCost India Project)</p>	<p>Chairperson Secretary/ Principal Secretary, RWSS</p> <p>Members Commissioner, Rural Development Department Commissioner, Panchayatiraj Department Commissioner & Director, M.A Engineer-in-Chief, RWSS Engineer-in-Chief, PHED Engineer-in-Chief, Major Irrigation Chief Engineer, Tribal welfare Special Secretary (I & CAD), GOAP Director, Dept of Rural Drinking Water Supply, Government of India Director, Urban Water Supply, GOI Regional Coordinator, WSP Representative from UNICEF for A.P & Karnataka States Rural Development Trust, Ananthapur Research Director, WASHCost India</p> <p>Member Convener Director, CESS</p>

Brief Profile of some Key Players for Learning Opportunities on WASHCost Issues:

Agencies involved in Water and Sanitation at National and State level

Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission: The Government of India provided assistance to the states to accelerate the pace of coverage of problem villages through the programme known as Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP). The entire programme was given a mission approach and the technology mission on drinking water and related water management was called National Drinking Water Mission (NDWM). This NDWM was introduced in 1986. This NDWM was renamed as Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water Mission in 1991. This mission is a policy making body on WASH sector in India.

WES-Net India – Water and Environmental Sanitation Network: This is a network of stakeholders in the Water and Environmental Sanitation sector in India and it provides a platform to build partnerships and promote cooperation in the sector (involving policy makers and planners, service providers, NGOs, CSOs, resource organisations, external support organisations and interested individuals). WES-Net's objective is to improve knowledge sharing and co-ordination within the water and sanitation sector – focused on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

WSP – Water and Sanitation Programme: The Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) is a multi-donor partnership administered by the World Bank to support people in obtaining affordable, safe and sustainable access to water and sanitation services. It works directly with client governments at the local and national level in 25 countries to look at cost-effective technologies and models for providing safe water and sanitation to the world's poor. Helps the evolution of regulatory and structural changes needed for broad water and sanitation sector reform.

WaterAid and Other Donors: WaterAid began working in India in 1986. Currently, WaterAid India (WAI) works in 10 states; Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Main objective of WaterAid India is to enable improved access to sustainable, safe and adequate water supply and sanitation through water, sanitation and hygiene projects. Since 2003, WaterAid India shifted its focus from southern India to include the poorer states in the north to better target India's most vulnerable communities. Other donors working on WASH issues would also be invited to be members of learning alliance.

FANSA and Other Networks: Freshwater Action Network (FAN) is a major network of civil society organizations implementing and influencing water and sanitation policy and practice. FAN works to improve water governance by strengthening the role of civil society in decision-making, linking the environmental and developmental agenda, for the realization of the right to water and sanitation for present and future generations. Other networks working on WASH related issues would be included in the Learning Alliance eventually.

NGRI – National Geophysical Research Institute: This is a premier institute for research in solid earth. This is an ISO 9001 organization. The core research areas of the organization are Minerals, Hydrocarbons, Groundwater, Earthquake hazard, Lithosphere and Environmental Geophysics. The core objectives of the

institute include evolution of management schemes for long term and optimal utilization of available resources as well as simulating and analyzing the cost-effective augmentation of groundwater resource, Monitoring and analyses of geo-chemical contamination (mainly Fluoride), simulation of rock-water interaction and its migration as well as designing of suitable measures for groundwater protection and Study of socio-economic viability of various groundwater management schemes including agri-changes etc. Other national level institutions engaged with WASH sector related research would also be included in the learning alliance.

DFID – Department for International Development: In 1997 the Department for International Development (DFID) was created to meet the many challenges of tackling world poverty. DFID's largest country programme and its largest country office are in India. Reducing poverty here is crucial to the global success of the Millennium Development Goals. In 2002-07, DFID spent £1 billion in India, and from 2008 to 2011, DFID India will be investing another £825 million, up to £500 million of which will be spent on health and education. DFID's main challenges in India are: malnutrition, child and maternal deaths, education, water and sanitation. Similarly, other bilateral agencies working on WASH sector would be invited to be members of learning alliance, depending on the learning need and agenda of learning alliance. **NGOs and NGO Networks:** The NGOs working in water and sanitation activities will also be part of these informal networks. Further the district level and state level NGO networks will be invited and the project outputs will be shared with these agencies for enhancing their capabilities to address the issues of sustainable service delivery of WASH services.

Universities & Research Organizations: Networking with various universities and research organizations which are doing a pioneering work in water and sanitation sector. These institutes will also be part of the learning alliance. Project results and other outputs will be shared among these agencies at an appropriate platform.

NRSA - National Remote Sensing Centre: NRSA is a Department of Space sponsored organization devoted to the acquisition, processing, and dissemination of remote sensing data. Data is acquired primarily via India's own IRS 1-A and 1B, as well as satellites belonging to other countries, such as USA's Landsat. NRSA's data is used by a number of agencies of the Government of India in the areas of ground water targeting, flood mapping and damage assessment, soil mapping, watershed management, crop estimation, ocean studies, etc. The utility of remote sensing data to a developing country like India has been highly appreciated by policy planners. Many agencies, public as well as private, seek NRSA's help for the acquisition and processing of needed data.