



BURKINA FASO

Learning Alliance Process in WASHCost Burkina Faso



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND REFERENCES**Documents :**

- Rapid Assessment report : study carried out by WASHCost project in 2008
- Minutes of LA meetings in 2008 and 2009
- Minutes of Task Force meetings in 2008 and 2009
- LA members interviews reports
- LA briefing notes on SWICH project

Thanksgiving : interviewed resource persons

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning Alliances (LA) is one of the main instruments of WASHCost project in Burkina Faso. Purposely, it aims at ensuring project's impact at scale. It is the first time that the concept is initiated in Burkina Faso, in WASH sector. The present document accounts for the documentation of the LA process for lessons learnt and follow up of the performance of the instrument with regard to the achievement of expected results of the project.

The methodology used is based on interviews, desk study, survey and observation. The present document is written on the project in Burkina Faso. It will be used as background information by the focal point of process documentation at IRC, together with other countries' documents, to issue a general one on the WASHCost global project. These two steps took from September to December 2009 to complete the activities and to write the final documents.

1.1. THE WASH SECTOR IN BURKINA FASO

In general, Water Sanitation and Hygiene sector is very busy and dynamic in Burkina Faso. Analysis of the **legislative framework** reveals that there are many laws but the sector lacks adequate application decrees and specific law on unit cost. Unit cost is rarely addressed in very few documents like National Programme for WASH and MDGs, drinking water infrastructures maintenance reform and the "Mercurial" of public works.

The sector is going under deep reforms. Main sector actors in charge of WASH are governmental departments, NGOs, Research and Academic institutions, Private sector and technical and financial partners. The ministry in charge of water and agriculture (MAHRH) remain the mains central actor.

All these central actors have planned to decentralise and to transfer WASH responsibilities and competences to communes and autonomous communities in the context of the **decentralisation process of WASH** sector in which Burkina Faso is engaged since 2003.

Lack of official **information on unit costs in WASH** sector is preventing local actors, especially, from conducting adequate planning and budgeting processes. The National Programme for WASH and MDGs is the master plan towards 2015 for which all sector actors are invited to incorporate their services provision interventions. The programme recommends the elaboration of five years decentralised and communal development plans for each commune in order to federate the intervention of sector actors and to facilitate the follow up of the progress, the harmonization of tools, technologies and strategies.

There are urgent needs for **capacities in planning and budgeting** due to lack of quality resource persons in the sector at local level. The nation programme for MDGs include a component of capacity building according to various categories of actors namely, central and local public actors, non governmental, private, ... To that regards, many central actors have started transferring competences and resources to local actors.

1.2. WASH COST IN BURKINA FASO

WASHCost is a five years action research project aimed at quantifying the real disaggregated cost related to sustainable life-cycle WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) services to poor populations in rural and peri urban areas in Burkina Faso. WASHCost is a participatory project that will involve decision makers and practitioners in collecting and analysing data on existing projects in the country. It is expected that the results and the findings will provide supports to be used in the planning and governance of WASH service delivery. To that regard WASHCost will embed improved pro-poor decision-making processes in WASH sector in Burkina Faso.

A learning alliance mechanism will be developed in the project to facilitate the involvement of the sector actors in the project activities in order to achieve relatively sound embedding of the project results and to expect impacts at reasonable scale.

WASHCost is being implemented in Burkina Faso by CREPA (Centre Régional pour l'Eau Potable et l'Assainissement à faible coût) as a lead partner. In addition, the project is receiving political and strategic support from governmental departments, especially, the general directorate of water and the general directorate of sanitation. Other partners intervene at variable degrees in the project have been selected among the Learning Alliance members.

In Burkina Faso, the project was set up in May 2008. The official launch was chaired by the minister in charge of water and agriculture of Burkina Faso in Sept of the same year. Since then, the project has implemented many activities with regard to the following components: research, monitoring and learning, learning alliance, process documentation and information.

Regarding Learning Alliance, the project has set up a platform of sector actors at national level. The LA started in Sept 2008 with a planning meeting and identification of members needs. The LA is made up with different components of the WASH sector in Burkina Faso. The main players are selected from various categories such as, research, academic, governmental, Non Governmental Organisations, sector platform. Learning Alliance activities of the first year are fundamentally based on the learning and sharing process and project based research activities, in order to achieve collaborative action research and ensure sound embedding of the project outputs.

A part from the Learning Alliance developed at national level, the learning strategy includes also the development of a specific Task Force and the exploration for networking with existing sector platforms that can be used to increase the embedding process of the project result to the end users levels. This will be further developed in the document together with other actions as innovative learning strategy in WaSHCost.

2. INTERVENTION LOGIC

The project long term Global Vision of Success:– Within 10 years, good quality disaggregated cost information is readily accessible to and being used globally by stakeholders in the WASH sector to improve the outcomes of planning processes and, in particular, to achieve 1) A 25% like-for-like improvement in cost efficiency and 2) A situation where at least 25% of WASH implementation plans include or are explicitly linked to unit costs analysis and poverty reduction strategies.

The vision of success of WASHCost Burkina Faso for 2009 is a well advanced pilot research data collection process with close involvement of a functioning and committed learning alliance (LA). WASHCost Burkina Faso visibility will therefore be increased in WASH sector.

The overall goal of the project in Burkina Faso is to improve sustainable WASH service delivery. The strategy is to work with key actors to determine the life cycle cost for sustainable WASH service delivery and use the unit cost information as an entry point for better decision making in the WASH sector.

To achieve this vision, the country implementation strategy focus in 2009 is based upon:

- the construction of the research methodology thorough pilot data collection and analysis with close involvement of the Learning Alliance;
- the dissemination and the promotion of WASHCost information in the sector
- the expansion and strengthening of the Learning Alliance,
- the reinforcement of the Task Force involvement in the research methodology construction and validation;
- the creation of alliances with other stakeholders and large implementation programs, basically at national level.
- The networking of existing platforms in WASH sector in the country, Priority will be given also to monitoring & learning and the consolidation of the country team.

It is anticipated that the concepts and approaches WASHCost is advocating for in Burkina Faso will also lead to the beginning of the awareness raising relative to the consideration of WASH unit cost at certain actors level, starting from the key learning alliances members.

Learning Alliance mechanism is a key implementation strategy of the project. Some country specificities are considered in the development of the learning alliance process. The WASH sector is undergoing profound reforms featured by the decentralisation and the delegation of the decision process towards local actors. The process is not mature yet and it is leading some intermediary situations whereby the two level decision making systems are cohabitating with some uncertainties.

Under these circumstances, WASHCost Burkina Faso is privileging three different learning alliance strategies. The first and basic one is the maintenance and facilitation of a sector platform at national level. The extension of this platform in the districts and lower levels will be developed in the coming years. This can be considered as the starting point of the Learning Alliance. The second strategy is the setting up of the Task Force of which members

are selected from the larger learning alliance. Its aim is to support the research activities and the members are from research institutions mixed with governmental departmental representatives. The third level strategy is the promotion of the WASHCost ambassadors. They are sector actors who have attached specific interest to the project but are lacking time to participate to the LA meetings. They provide specific in kind supports to the project with short interventions and strategic facilitations to project activities. This group of ambassadors is ready to promote the project results once the research is successful. At the end of the day, WASHCost in Burkina Faso will lean on these three levels of Learning Alliance strategy.

In addition, networking in WASH sector will become in the coming years an important strategy of the project embedding. There are some operational existing platforms that have been identified so far as potential collaboration bodies. There are opportunities to mainstream WASHCost tools within these networks activities in which part of the sector actors are already involved. The rationale is that WASHCost can not sustain a stand alone Learning Alliance for long term, especially beyond the project. To that regard, these networks will be used as relays to promote and disseminate unit cost tools. It is expected that this strategy will contribute to the wide spread of the tools and the LCC approach to certain scale with regard to the project vision.

3. LEARNING ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES

3.1. UNDERSTANDING THE SECTOR AND SETTING UP THE LEARNING ALLIANCE

The launch of the Learning Alliance in WASHCost project is a step-by-step process starting from preliminary actions to specific activities related to advocacy and promotion. The first activities undertaken was the scoping visit organised before the launch of the project in Burkina Faso. It involved part of the IRC staff with support of the project local partner CREPA. Both team visited key institutions to access the acceptance of the project and to identify the needs. At this stage, many actors were already interested to the project approach. They form the first sector actors who are potential members of the Learning Alliance.

The scoping visit offered opportunity to gather useful information of the sector environment in Burkina Faso, in order to understand the sector and to access the feasibility of the learning alliance in the country. The scoping visit was successful in the identification of the project partner in Burkina Faso in addition to the potential institutions for collaboration purpose.

In support to the scoping visit, few sensitizations and advocacy activities were initiated towards key actors to spread an initial understanding of the project which can be described as an approach to improved WASH governance.

Then, came up the pre launch meeting of the project in June 2008, considered as the kick off event in informing the whole sector about the WASHCost project. Many sector actors have been invited to the meeting aimed at informing about the project and collect feedbacks in various ways. The meeting participants were asked to express what the WASHCost project

can contribute to the WASH sector in Burkina Faso. To that regards, the needs of the actors were identified in smaller groups. The meeting ended with the nomination of key institutions which will form later the core of the learning alliance (Task Force). Other activities during the meeting were related to the determination of the opportunities and constraints that the project can face during its implementation.

All these interactions helped to get reasonable overview of the WASH sector. However, as far as the WASH sector understanding is concerned, the institutional mapping can be mentioned as the main action. A rapid assessment of the WASH sector was organised at the early stage of the project to get better understanding of the sector environment. It was a comprehensive study that covered various aspects of the sector, including unit cost issues. It can be seen as a mirror of the sector which provided information on the state of knowledge, practices and attitudes, precisely on the existing governance and interactions between actors, the links between the categories of actors, the magnitude of those relationships. Because the assessment took some period, LA members were involved in the data collection. They were invited to facilitate data collection in their respective institutions and to contribute to the validation of the document.

The first meeting of the project Learning Alliance came up the day after the official launch of the project, on the 23rd of September 2008. Most of the institutions identified during previous activities were invited to the meeting. The meeting can be considered as a planning meeting. Number of activities were identified and planned over the year. Basically, the process of learning and sharing formed the basis of the alliance. Capacity development activities were requested from the participants as potential contribution of the project to the sector, which is currently lacking capacities in WASH related issues. In addition, the project has to evolve in the context of Millennium Development Goals where well defined targets have to be achieved.

About twenty participants attended the meeting. They were from different categories of the sector, governmental, Non Governmental, academic / training, research, national and local level institutions and financial partners. The group was representative of the WASH sector in Burkina Faso.

After all, the Learning Alliance was made easier by the strong willingness of sector actors to share experiences and reinforce capacities in water governance. The number of actors invited was limited according to the project capacity to sustain this interaction over the project life cycle. Generally, the number of participants varies between 15-20 sector actors.

Learning Alliance is a new idea brought by WASHCost project. The rationale behind it and the content was not dictated by the project. But the purpose is basically to bring the project results to scale through good and sound embedding that can guarantee ownership and replicable actions. Taken as a platform, similar experiences do exist in the sector, since WASH networks are already operational in the country.

3.2. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

The main activities of the LA in Burkina Faso are the quarterly capacity building workshops that have been planned since the first meeting. The contents of the workshops are based on the training tools developed by IRC within WASHIKA project. This tool kit was still under development in the context of the West Africa regional programme between IRC and CREPA. The first 3 modules that were ready in the kit were planned. However, if this kit has to support the learning alliance in Burkina Faso, there will be shortage, because all the modules have not yet undergone the process of finalisation and adaptation to Burkina Faso context.

Three modules were addressed as follows :

- local water governance in Sept 2008
- participatory planning in Jan 2009
- funding and cost recovery in May 2009

At the end of the year, in Dec 2009, a meeting was organised to identify the progress made so far and to plan the coming year activities.

One objective of the project is the ownership of the project. In this regard, LA members were occasionally solicited to support some decisions making processes. The project consulted the LA in the following actions:

- identification of the project research pilot sites
- identification of the local actors that supported the data collection in the field,
- facilitation of data collection, especially, access to information requested
- exchanges on the project data collection tools

Apart from general LA meetings and activities, the Task Force members are used to meet on ad hoc basis to participate in specific activities regarding research-the Country.

They usually share information on the project and the research methodology, the validation of data collection tools and strategies, the selection of pilot sites and the restitution of data collection results. When there is a pilot, the project team members always meet the actors intervening in the targeted areas. Besides, a specific institution can be entrusted a particular mission, according to their competences and WASHCost research needs.

So far, the Task Force members have been involved in three pilots. The first one occurred at Saaba in the centre, Thion in the Eastern region and Gaoua in Western region, between December 2008 and January 2009. The second pilot was held in Ouahigouya area in the Northern region in Mai 2009. It was continued in combination of Central region up to October 2009. Thanks to the collaboration of the Task Force, partners from these areas have been involved to facilitate the collection process and the finding of secondary data.

Other contributions of the task force in research are as follows:

- - The University of Ouagadougou had supplied database manager during the two early data collection
- - The University of Bobo Dioulasso gave a data analyst and data manager for the recent pilot.
- - The Regional Centre for Agriculture and water resources "DRAHRH" serves as a focal point for WASHCost in the North of the country, facilitation all research activities in this area.
- -The Catholic Organisation for development and Solidarity "OCADES" has supplied data collectors for the previous pilot.

- - The Communes facilitated the team interventions in the field.
- - The General Water Directorate (DGRE) has collected information on the costs of the WASH facilities.
- - CREPA Burkina provided data collectors for all pilots

It is expected that these collaborative actions will lead to the ownership of the project and to increase project capacities of bringing the research to scale in 2010.

Apart from the above formal activities made up with meetings and Task Force involvement in research, WASHCost team members attend some sector meetings. Besides, LA members are sometimes invited or receive team visits in order to have professional discussions with them. Exchange of mails and telephone calls are also important in strengthening the ties with the national partners.

Table summary of activities

N°	Activity	Date	Reéarks
1	Sharing workshop on local water governance (local water governance in Burkina Faso)	Sept 2008	
2	Sharing workshop on participatory planning	Jan 2009	
3	Sharing workshop on Funding and cost recovery in WASH	May 2009	
4	Panning and assessment meeting	Dec 2009	
5	Task force meeting 1 on institutional mapping validation	Nov 2009	
6	Task force meeting 2 on research methodology and pilot sites identification	Jan 2009	
7	Task force meeting 3 on pilot research results	June 2009	
8	Task force meeting 4 on pilot research data analysis and planning of research scaling up	Oct 2009	
9	Communication activities and distance contacts with LA and Task Force members		

3.3. ROLES OF THE LEARNING ALLIANCE FACILITATOR AND SUPPORT FROM WASHCOST IRC

Regarding the management of the LA, the project coordinator is charged with the facilitation of the platform. The facilitation is limited to the planning, logistic organisation, design of proposed meetings agenda that participants amend at the beginning of the meeting. Identification of the meetings facilitators and their mobilisation is another task that the LA facilitator deals with. Within the LA, there are no formal roles. Learning Alliance members are tied by a horizontal relationship and what matters is their commitment and active participation in the project implementation.

The facilitation of the Learning Alliance occurs rather as a team work. The LA facilitation is decentralized to all team members in the project who are involved in various components regarding logistic, content preparation, documentation, communication and research. The project team members together with LA members participate to the meetings facilitation through specific presentations as requested from the agenda.

The facilitation is extended to the IRC team, as the regional Governance Specialists are involved in the meetings. The three first sharing meetings were facilitated by the two regional governance specialists, through regional cooperation between Ghana and Burkina Faso.

A part from that, IRC provides distance support which can be considered as strategic in the sense that discussions on the LA concepts and generalities occurred during project meetings at global level.

3.4. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES IN THE FIRST PROJECT PERIOD

The setting up of the LA platform remains one of the biggest successes that WASHCost project has achieved so far in Burkina Faso. In one year, the project manages to maintain a stand alone platform in the sector. As such, the project has become an instrument for the WASH sector in Burkina Faso. So far learning and sharing appears to be the main subject of the platform, made up with representatives from different categories of the WASH sector.

The involvement of the LA members in the project activities, especially in the research, is the second important success. Members are keen and have shown their availability and willingness to participate to research methodology build up and its piloting and to support the project in data collection. Project partners contribute in the implementation of the project by making suggestions about the research methodology. The Task Force members are actively involved in research activities and contribute to data analysis.

These commitments have been possible through advocacy actions. So far, the mobilisation is satisfactory and appears as a guarantee for the scaling up of the research activities in coming years.

The platform is already facing some challenges regarding participation, strategy and learning process.

One of the biggest challenges is how to manage to get the LA members more regular in the representation of their respective institutions in the LA meetings. This instability of the members' participation is related to the current WASH sector dynamic, many projects are going on and the sector is actively mobilised to achieve MDGs goals. Thus, new members are always attending meetings, raising the need to constantly come back to previous issues already discussed in past meetings.

Will it be sustainable to try to keep a stand alone platform for WASHCost? The WASH sector in Burkina Faso is known as sector of networks. Will it not be more beneficial for the project to collaborate with the existing platforms? Can this approach be a solution for the above challenge related to the regularity of the members?

Another challenge is that actors are anxious to access the research results. This expectation is well expressed and is related to the information of the cost of infrastructures, mainly the Capex. The challenge is how to meet this expectation since the WASHCost research agenda is spread over years, thinking of the design and the availability of the decision support tool.

The WASH sector in Burkina Faso is undergoing reforms including decentralisation and delegation of responsibilities to local actors. At central level, many partners are following this reform. The recent LA meeting has raised this issue and it was strongly advised to WASHCost Burkina Faso to consider this reform in the project approach in order to target actors at local levels. Meeting this expectation will require a certain prioritisation and strategic choices, since there are over three hundred communes in the country.

The project will need to develop very quickly some tools required to support the learning and sharing process during the coming LA meetings in 2010. Especially, tools regarding Life Cycle Cost that can be adapted the target groups at central and local levels. Other tools or modules that can be used for capacity development and advocacy should receive adequate interest in early 2010.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main achievement so far is the setting up of the LA platform and the involvement of LA members in research activities. As such, the WASHCost research is participatory and collaborative in Burkina Faso.

LA meetings provide frameworks for learning and sharing. It is expected that this process will be extended to embrace a change process. However, no specific tool is currently available for WASHCost approach on Life Cycle Cost, some tools that are adapted to the target group. Actually, the specific tools required to support the theory of change are expected from the research result, and the research is not completed yet.

For this reason, at this early stage of the LA, it can be said that the platform is gradually prepared to support future process of change.

There are many opportunities for the successful implementation of the project in Burkina. The lack of reliable data in the sector means that the sector is favourable to the embedding of the research outputs. The existing political willingness is another asset for the WASHCost project. What is required from the project is to find and share the unit disaggregated cost of WASH services. The sharing process will require from the project actors to design and to develop decision support tool that can be suitable and adapted to current practices of sector actors, preferably at local level because of the decentralisation of WASH services decision making process in the country.

It can be seen that the success of the project will partly depend on its ability to meet that expectation.

As for the WASHCost goals, LA members approve the project, as it will allow awareness raising in the sector and will help improve the planning and budgeting process especially at local actors levels. This is another opportunity for the future ownership of the project results.

The representative of the ministry in charge of the decentralisation process in the LA has estimated that the project's objectives are especially suitable to their WASH programmes in the sense that local actors are charged with new responsibilities in both WASH projects implementation and in planning. To that regard, many members expect that the WASHCost project will provide them with unit cost information in the country to develop planning capacities of the local actors.

Thus, it is clearly understood the above position of the members during the last meeting of the year 2009, where, it was strongly advised to the project to start to include local actors in the LA activities and to launch the regional level of LA platform.

The last survey of the LA provided some overviews of how sector actors perceive the platform. This paragraph presents the main results of the survey.

In general, members think that the platform has clear objectives and that they are suitable to their expectations.

The facilitation of the LA is acceptable to most of the members. Meetings' agenda are well defined and respected as commonly agreed. The agenda are estimated acceptable and suitable because of its flexibility.

Regarding the content of the sharing meetings, some members appreciate the topics that they think, are relevant and address issues related to national WASH sector. However, other members observed that the topics are too technical according to their backgrounds. This variable appreciation of the contents is just a mirror of the composition of the LA of which members are from different background ranking from engineers to communicators including social scientists.

The survey has introduced a question on the impacts of the LA in the sector. At this level, many members stated that they organise feedbacks to their respective institutions after the LA meetings. This can be a significant contribution to the process of change in long run provided that other favourable factors and conditions are met at the right time.

The calendar of the LA meetings did not meet all members' approval. It was agreed to organise sharing meetings at the end of the week including Saturdays, once a quarter. However, some members disagree with this arrangement and suggest to cancel meetings on Saturdays and to reduce the frequency of the meetings.

If some members are happy with their involvement in the project activities, others think that they are not associated to the project Implementation. Looking at the limited financial resources and threshold of the project, will it be possible to slice up adequately the project to accommodate all members? Will it be a good strategy to limit the LA members to actors directly involved in project activities?

1. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After one year of learning alliance process in Burkina Faso, some lessons have been learnt from which recommendations will be suggested to improve upon the process.

- Considering the on going dynamics in WASH sector in Burkina Faso, the management of a stand-alone platform in WASH sector, though achieving some successes, has some limitations that might be considered.

Therefore, the recommendation is to include the irregularity of members during meetings in the development of a well targeted communication strategy. The irregularity should not be seen as sign of lack of interest. It is just due to professional moves, missions and combination of activities.

- The project has started the LA platform with national actors. It was planned to gradually include regional actors in order to set up the intermediary and local platforms. In the context of decentralisation of the WASH sector, it has been observed that many actors at national level are supporting local actors to strengthen their capacities, to enable them assuming responsibilities in WASH.

It is therefore recommended to speed up the process of extending the LA activities to local actors. LA members at national levels will provide strategic supports to facilitate the transition leading to the setting up of intermediary platforms.

- The project is being implemented in the favourable conditions featured high expectations from sector actors. The lesson is to include these expectations in the WASHCost project to increase the embedding of the outputs.
- The existence of the other networks in the sector can provide opportunities for useful partnerships with the LA in order to increase impacts of the project. LA members have reflected on this strategy and it was advised to the project to build on the regional networks to develop intermediary LAs in the country.

The recommendation related to this lesson is to extend activities to regional levels.

- The LA is made up with composite members from different categories of the sector. Consequently, the content of the meetings should be adapted to the knowledge levels of the members.

To avoid shortage of modules to support the sharing process of the LA, it is recommended to address quickly, with the support of WASHCost IRC team, the design and development of materials for local and intermediary actors.