

## Learning Alliance Concept Note

The present document accounts for the concept of Learning Alliance that is currently under experimentation in the WASHCost project in Burkina Faso. The project started in late 2008 for five years and the Learning Alliance is an instrument intended to support the theory of change targeted in the project. Being the first experience in the sector, the concept note aims at providing a theoretical overview of the approach together with the main achievements and the perspectives.

### 1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

WASHCost is a five years action research project aimed at quantifying the real disaggregated costs related to sustainable 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 stakeholders and practitioners in collecting and analysing data on existing projects in the country. The results and the findings of the research activities will provide supports to facilitate the planning process and to improve upon governance of WASH services delivery. To that regard WASHCost will embed improved pro-poor decision-making processes in WASH sector in Burkina Faso. Some specific decision support tools are expected at the end of the research, to boost the achievement of the above objectives. As a reminder, the project long term Global Vision of Success:– Within 10 years, good quality disaggregated cost information is readily accessible 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.

A learning alliance mechanism is 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 a five years project of the international water and sanitation centre (IRC) in Netherlands. WASHCost is being implemented in four countries including Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mozambique and India. In Burkina Faso, the project is lead by CREPA (Centre Régional pour l'Eau Potable et l'Assainissement à faible coût) a long date partner for IRC in West Africa. 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. They have been selected among the Learning Alliance members.

The context in which the project is implemented is that 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 undergoing deep reforms features by the decentralisation and the transfer of WASH responsibilities and assets to communes (districts) and autonomous communities.

There are urgent needs for **capacities in planning and budgeting** due to lack of quality resource persons in the sector at local level. The national rural WASH programme for MDGs includes a component of capacity building destined to various categories of actors. To that regard, many central actors have started transferring competences, assets and resources to local authorities and actors.

Therefore, it can be seen that the WASHCost project will surely find its place in the sector. There are many opportunities for which the project will contribute to the improvement of the practices and knowledge. The mainstream of the project results in WASH sector in Burkina Faso may require some time due to the change process constraints, but presents many interests for the sector actors in need of unit cost instruments especially at local levels.

## **2. DEFINITION OF THE LEARNING ALLIANCE**

The Learning Alliance approach is not widely spread or promoted in water and sanitation sector for which the instrument is quite new. The WASHCost project is using the mechanism for its advantage in promoting changes about practices and knowledge of stakeholders.

The theory supporting the Learning Alliance leans on the following observations:

- Often the factors that made an innovative pilot scheme work, cannot be replicated because they required an external NGO or special funding or an unusually motivated team at community level. So how can successful community level programmes be sustained and spread to the extent that they make a difference on a national or regional scale?
- Increasingly the focus is on how critical actors at district or national level are involved with and learn from valid lessons from research. Do they share a framework for understanding problems and solutions? Do they see each other as allies, or as rivals?
- This is a particular problem in WASH sector with many actors from different organisations, and where different government departments take the lead on different aspects of water policy and management.

A learning alliance can be the answer to these problems.

A learning alliance is therefore a group of representative stakeholders with a shared understanding of the problem to be solved. They aim to come to shared and commonly owned approach to dealing with the problem that leads to implementation, scaling up faster and wider and a sense of ownership. (Patrick Moriaty et al)

The change that the WASHCost project is ambitioning to introduce in the WASH sector in Burkina Faso requires a typical instrument that the learning alliance approach can effectively contribute to.

### **3. OBJECTIVES AND PARTNERS OF THE LEARNIN ALLIANCE BURKINA FASO**

In Burkina Faso, the project was set up in May 2008. 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 main goal of the Learning Alliance approach in Burkina Faso is, primarily, to achieve the participatory implementation of the project in order to improve upon local WASH governance in the country with the research results.

Specific objectives include:

- to involve key sector actors in the project activities,
- to achieve acceptable embedding of the project results in WASH Sector at reasonable scale
- to ensure sustainable dissemination of the project results.

Since the launch of the project, three different categories of partners have been associated to the approach of Learning Alliance, they include:

- The larger group of Learning Alliance : this group is made up of key sector actors, selected among different categories of stakeholders. Thus the larger group is made up with different components of the WASH sector and comprises actors from central governmental departments, local government actors, WASH donors representative, research and training institutions, NGO's platform. This group currently varies from 15 to 20 stakeholders.
- The second group is more or less task focused: some key WASH research centres have been involved in the project to ensure collaborative research and quality insurance of the research. Thus, a Task Force of less than 10 research /training institutes was formed and has been involved in the project research so far. Delegation of research activities to members of this group during the scaling up phase, is successfully concluded.
- The third group is more or less informal partners that are supporting the project on one way or another. This group receives the label of WASHCost ambassadors. Though they don't take part of above mentioned meetings, they buy in the project vision and provide facilitation to the project implementation. They are sector actors who have attached specific interest to the project but are lacking time to participate to the formal LA meetings. They provide specific supports, in kind, to the project with short interventions and strategic facilitations to project activities. This group of ambassadors is willing to promote the project results once the research is successful.

The following table provides an overview of the participants to the meetings

Name	Institution	LA	Task Force
PODA Etienne	CCEPA: WASH NGO's Network	X	
BAYALA Piboué Maxime	Plan Burkina	X	
TAPSOBA Ludovic	IUCN Burkina Faso	X	
SAWADOGO Georges	Journalist Network	X	
ZONGO Jean R.	Mayor of Commune of Poa	X	
MADRE Issa	Ministry of Decentralisation	X	X



minister. In this programme, the newly decentralised and local authorities are entrusted with the planning, management and implementing responsibilities.

The expectation of the ministry and sector actors is therefore to easily access accurate unit cost information to allow new players, with low capacities, to better play their roles in the MDGs' programme.

To that regard, the embedding success of the project relies on its ability to fulfil this expectation of availing acceptable unit cost data to sector actors. Besides, the sharing and dissemination of information on unit cost will go in line with the spread of the LCC approach, as they are compatible.

The second embedding opportunity of WASHCost in Burkina Faso has started with the sector actors starting having stakes in the project. The vision of the sustainability of the project aligns with the target of ownership of the project by sector actors.

Two levels of actors' involvement in the project have been initiated. The larger group of LA contributes to strategic decision making like pilot research sites, validation of key documents and amendment of data collection tool. Apart from the Learning Alliance developed at national level, a Task Force was set up and members have been involved in all research pilots. The Task Force is used to meet on ad hoc basis to participate in specific activities regarding research. Members 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. Besides, a specific institution can be entrusted a particular mission, according to its competences and WASHCost research needs.

At the advanced stage of these embedding processes, the expected impacts are foreseen at many levels :

- sector actors will use the unit cost information, if WASHCost project can collect and make accessible data at reasonable quality;
- research institutions has shown interest to take forward the WASHCost methodology in order to replicate it in other research projects and for other purposes;
- the Life Cycle Approach (LCCA) will integrate water schools curricula for the training of future engineers and decision makers for long term impacts in water sector in Africa; due to the presence of national and international water and environmental institutions in Ouagadougou. Training modules development will boost achievement of this impact and requires adequate attention from the project.
- Project's partners like CREPA that are regional networks offer framework for the dissemination of the approach in other countries. Embedding process at the project lead partner levels took place at early stage of the project as part of the project staff come from CREPA. The communication and research activities receive support from the lead partner.
- Project partners are eager to participate, especially in kind to the project further activities.

More embedding opportunities are expected with the progress of the project.

## **5. PERSPECTIVES OF LEARNING ALLIANCE IN WASHCOST BURKINA FASO**

Basically, the development of the LA pursues the goal of supporting and facilitating the project activities at all levels. The learning alliance therefore remains a key strategy of the project. In the coming years, the progress of the LA approach will align with the project research progress. Besides, the challenges that the LA is encountering push to develop mitigation strategies in order to sustain the positive results achieved so far. Therefore, it is planned that the following aspects of the LA will require adequate changes in the coming years:

1) The content of the sharing and learning meetings of the LA : so far, the sharing process embraces topics generally related to WASH governance. In view of the dissemination of the LCC approach, the project will gain to focus the topics more on unit cost issues and tools. For that reason, the research activities will need to include this consideration in research questions and analysis in order to produce well targeted results in this regard.

How can LCC be presented from the stakeholders' experiences ?

How can the LCC approach better fit the knowledge and the practices of the LA members?

These are some questions that the research will gain to provide materials to support LA meetings.

2) The sustainability of a stand alone approach for the LA: WASHCost will hardly sustain the functioning of the LA by providing continuously financial and human resources. Therefore a sustainability strategy in LA, based on networking with existing platforms deserves attention. Prior assessment showed that the sector in Burkina Faso has significant number of functional platforms. Some of them offer opportunities for collaboration. WASHCost will then encourage collaboration with some existing networks, like RCD, PNAEPA, CCEPA. The format and the framework of the collaboration will be précised on practical basis.

3) The communication strategy based on face to face meetings will be improved with distance communication : it has already started but will be gradually developed in complementary with the face to face contacts. In view of sustaining the LA platform, distance communication appears determinant and offers opportunity to function beyond the project lifespan. Information technology tools are crucial in the realisation of the ambition.

4) The progress of the LA to meet two important requirements:

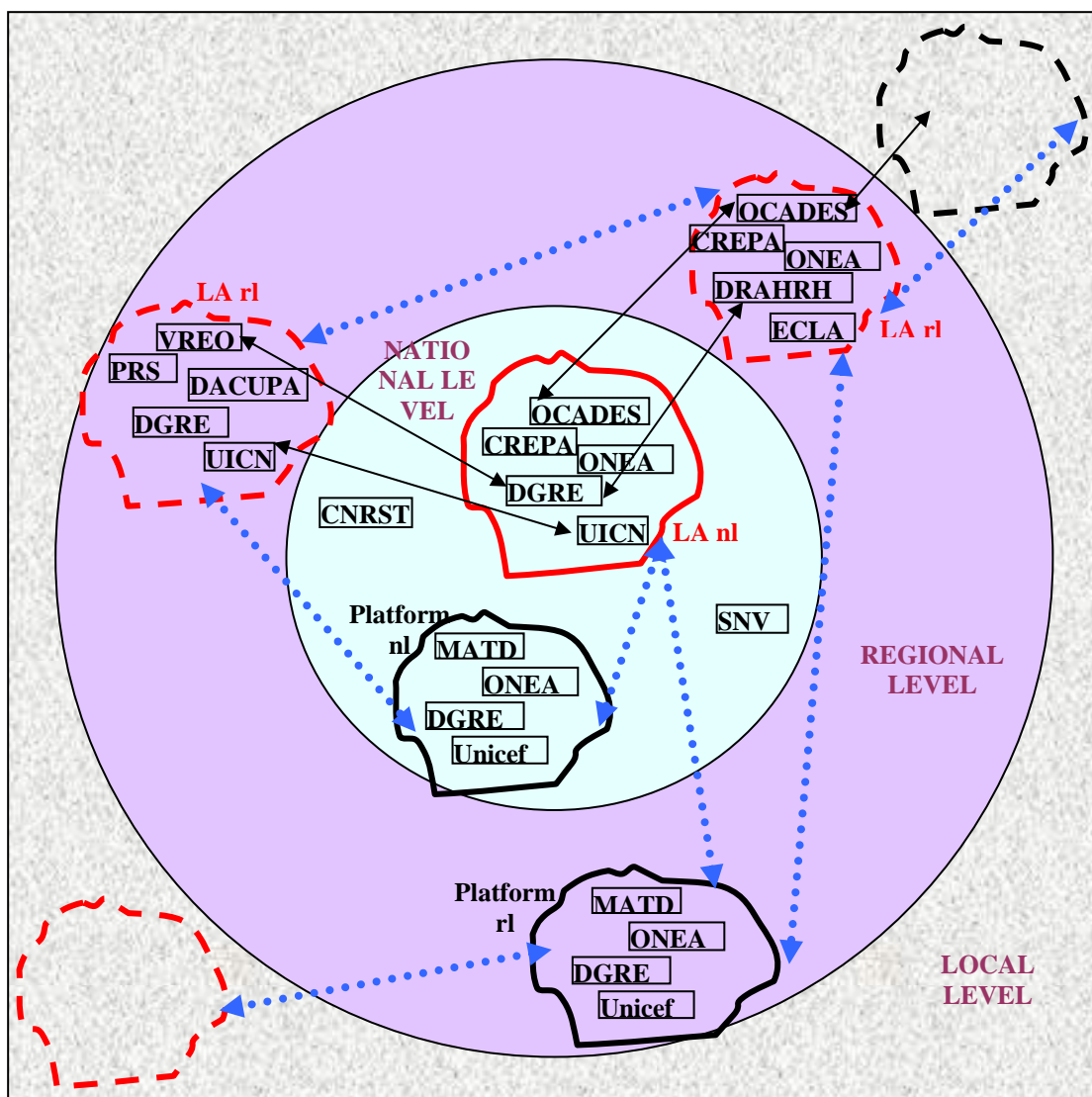
- The national WASH reform : in the context of the decentralisation policy and reforms that the sector is undergoing in the country, the general trend currently observed from central actors remains the empowerment of local actors to enable them to play their roles and to take in charge their responsibilities that are newly down delegated and transferred to them. LA members strongly recommend to the WASHCost project to extend the project activities to local authorities and to include local actors.
- The agenda of the WASHCost research in 2010 : the vision of the 2010 of WASHCost is the scaling up of research activities. Bearing in mind that one of the purposes of the LA is to support the research data collection and analysis, it is therefore logical that LA mechanism should follow research in the new pilot sites. The task force and LA members have selected the data collection sites in about six zones that cover the whole country. Logically, each zone will

require LA platform for data collection purposes. However, in view of effective and cost efficient strategy, the feasibility of LA for each zone will be correlated with the above defined strategy, especially; the collaboration of existing platforms may offer opportunities for intermediary LA branches.

Therefore, regional LA branches will start to take form in regions were the research will take place. The creation of the new bodies of the intermediary levels LAs will just respect all the above strategies defined for efficiency purpose.

Under no circumstance, the WASHCost can not afford to delay the decentralisation of the LA mechanism as the future progress of the platform. It is a key strategy for the coming years for the WASHCost project. The targeted decentralisation will build on the national level LA of which members have some regional offices.

The following diagram explains the foresee progress of the LA in Burkina Faso



**LEGENDE**

- LA nl : WASHCost Learning Alliance at national level
- Platform rl : Existing sector platform at regional level
- ← → Link between stakeholders
- Existing LA platform (solid red line)
- Future la platform (dashed red line)
- Future collaboration to between platforms (blue dotted arrow)