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LOCAL ACTION WITH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO IMPROVE AND
SUSTAIN WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES

**Regional capacity for WASH sector knowledge
management and learning in West and Central Africa**

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This paper assesses regional capacity for supporting governments in West and Central Africa in the development of their respective WASH sectors through knowledge management and learning. The assessment is based on a survey of relevant institutions and individuals in the region and takes into account assessments of the sector knowledge management and learning initiatives in eleven countries in the region. The main finding is that existing capacity at regional level is fragmented and not utilized to its full potential. Central to this is the absence of a clear link between the “supply” of knowledge products and the “demand” by users. Key conclusions include the need to (i) adapt the WASH learning agenda to the specific regional and national contexts, (ii) make better use of contributions from academia and the private sector and (iii) reinforce leadership roles of relevant continent-wide, regional and national bodies for knowledge management and sector learning.

Introduction

Sector learning seeks to systemise the capture and sharing of experiences in the WASH sector and to develop the sector’s capacity to reflect on the lessons. It provides a framework at the national level to create, transfer and mobilise knowledge for better service delivery, by enabling the sector to anticipate, respond actively to and influence a rapidly changing environment (IRC, 2010). In Ghana for example, learning alliances are shown to provide a promising approach towards promoting learning and adaptive capacity in the sector (Nkum, 2014). However, despite their critical importance, key information and knowledge are often not used or are applied in an unstructured manner in planning and implementing interventions. Obtaining information and using lessons learned locally and internationally remains a major challenge globally and often even more so in developing countries.

In 2015, UNICEF’s West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO), and IRC established a partnership to support 11 countries in Region to explore how their WASH sectors could be strengthened. The aim was to build upon the best practice in the delivery of sustainable and equitable WASH services. The partnership also explored possibilities for strengthening the organizational capacity at regional level in support of in-country learning and to facilitate inter-country and regional knowledge exchange on WASH in the region. Within this partnership framework a mapping study was conducted to address the following three questions:

- What is the existing capacity to support to Knowledge Management and Sector Learning (KMSL) in the West and Central Africa Region?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses in the practices of the regional organisations (networks, alliances or partnership) in support of enhanced KMSL in the countries of the region?
- What is the potential for strengthening KMSL in the region?

The countries included in the partnership programme are Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Niger and Nigeria.

The partnership is part of the broader Acceleration for Sanitation and Water for All programme and is funded by DGIS, DfID, UNICEF and IRC.

Methodology

The study methodology consisted of four components:

1. Establishing an inventory of the main organisations engaged in WASH with a regional outreach.
2. Administering two questionnaires using SurveyMonkey among 60 organizations in the region. One questionnaire was sent to 40 regional organisations (Group I), and the other, to 20 networks, alliances and partnerships (Group II). Participation was open from 30th July to 10th September 2015. Two reminders were sent with follow up to encourage a maximum response.
3. An analysis of the results of the country assessments conducted under the UNICEF-IRC Partnership relevant to the regional capacity to support KMSL in West and Central African countries.
4. A desk review of the knowledge and sector learning practices of the 14 main organisations with WASH knowledge management and sector learning activities in the West and Central Africa Region.

The Africa Joint WASH Learning initiative [1] provided the institutional anchor for the regional KMSL mapping study. It provided suggestions for institutions and individuals to be included in the study and provided feedback on draft reports. The intermediate results and main findings of the study were validated by the Reference Group of the UNICEF - IRC partnership. This briefing paper provides an objective picture of the main findings of the study based on the data obtained through the survey.

Results

Of the 60 organisations invited, 30 (50%) responded (23 in Group I and 7 in Group II). Within Group II there was a higher response rate from global networks and alliances. Africa-based networks or sub-regionally rooted alliances either did not or only respond partially to the questionnaire.

Existing capacity in the West and Central Africa region to support KMSL

Geographic & thematic focus. More than one third (38%) of the international NGOs and multi-lateral organisations surveyed have activities in several countries of the region. Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali stand out for a strong presence of international NGO's and multilateral organisations. The networks, alliances and partnerships collectively have activities in all countries of the region. However, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Mauritania seem to be largely excluded from those activities. Only a small number of the respondents in Group I (22%) focus their activities specifically on the WASH sector. The rest either have a broader water agenda or include other sectors. In Group II, two networks are specifically water and or sanitation focused. The largest group (71% of the respondents) addresses a broader water agenda that includes WASH.

KMSL Focus Areas & Dedicated Resources. Almost half of the organisations and 3 out of 4 networks state that they have an explicit focus on supporting KMSL in the region. While around half of the organisations do not have an explicit focus on KMSL in their organisational activities, KMSL is nevertheless reflected in the vision, mission, values or strategy of almost all of these organisations. More than half of the organisations in Group I (59 %) have dedicated staff for KMSL. Within Group II, all respondents stated having dedicated staff for KMSL activities. Many of the respondents gave a clear indication of the specific functions that are fulfilled by the KMSL staff members including responsibilities such as communication, coordination, facilitation, training, documentation and demand identification. Ten of the organisations in Group I and three organisations in Group II have a dedicated budget for both internal and external KMSL.

Target Audiences. National government (policy makers and technical staff) and NGO staff are among the priority target audiences for the knowledge transfer activities of most of the regional organisations. Organisations rarely target their knowledge development and transfer activities at academia, the private sector, the general population or specific groups such as women

KMSL Mechanisms & Channels for Dissemination. Publication on an organisation's website, presentation at events and the use of a dedicated mailing lists are the most popular channels and platforms used for dissemination of information and knowledge products. Facebook and other social media are used by networks, alliances and partnerships but in general the options requiring connectivity to the internet such as the use of a virtual library and other social media options (blog posts, webinars and others) are less likely to

be used by regional organisations. Regular information exchange meetings, websites and publications are among the most common platforms and mechanisms for KMSL being offered by the networks, partnerships and alliances; options for participation in communities of practice and e-discussions are not commonly available. Newsletter and regular exchange information meetings are the most popular options for KM and learning used by the member organisations of the networks, alliances and partnerships. Use of D-groups (a web-based supported virtual platform for exchange of information and knowledge among the group members), e-discussions and other virtual means are used less by the regional sector players for accessing sector information and knowledge.

Monitoring Use of KMSL products. More than three quarters of the organisations do not track the use of the disseminated knowledge products. Those that perform some kind of tracking do this through various means such as:

- Tracking website visits, downloads, and database consultation statistics,
- Web-utilization analytics reports, use of feedback opportunities on dissemination channels,
- Periodic evaluation,
- Feedback following emailing and tracking results in sector policies.

Limited resources, lack of dedicated staff and lack of good indicators to track influence are mentioned as among the most important structural limitations for tracking and monitoring the results of the use of the knowledge products.

KMSL Networks & Events. Sector actors in West and Central Africa engage in a wide range of sector networks and events. AfricaSan, the WASH Coalition and Global Water Partnership are the most popular and frequently used networks according to the results of the country assessment. The fact that AfricaSan is answered in response to this question on sector “networks” demonstrates that the responders did not necessarily make a distinction between a network and a platform. Most are continental networks or address WASH as part of a broader (water) development agenda, only a few of the identified networks are sector and sub-region specific. AfricaSan is most frequently mentioned among the regional stakeholders. Four of the eight mentioned events (See table 1) are Pan-African Events, occasionally held in the region. Others, like the annual WEDC conference and RWSN forum, are international events, sometimes hosted in the region, as was the case in 2016. There was no mention of participation in a regular event on WASH and or water with a particular focus for the West and/or Central Africa region countries.

Table 1. Participation in international and regional events	
Events	Times mentioned
Does your organization regularly participate in regional or international events for knowledge sharing, learning and policy influencing relevant for the WASH sector? What are those events?	
AfricaSan conference	8
African Water Week	3
World Water Week	5
World Water Forum	3
Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) Forum	2
Water and Sanitation for All (WSA) High Level meeting	1
African Development Bank Annual meeting	1
WEDC Conference	1

Source: KMSL assessment in West and Central Africa (IRC/ UNICEF WCARO, 2015)

Training institutes with regional outreach. The Institut International d'Ingénierie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement (2iE) of Burkina Faso is mentioned most often (27 times) in response to the following

question in the country assessments survey: “Which institutions in the West and Central Africa Region have your preference for attending or courses and trainings?” Other training institutions with some regional outreach include the National Water Resources Institute, in Nigeria (NWRI) (5x), Bioforce in Burkina Faso (4x) and CESAG, Senegal (4x), WSA or EAA (*Eau et Assainissement en Afrique*) (2x) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana (2x).

Desk Review of 14 relevant KMSL actors. More detailed desk research was carried out on the KM practices of 14 key players in the WASH sector in West and Central Africa. Many of these organisations are engaged in the organization and implementation of learning events in Africa. Many of the events are organized and co-hosted with participation of two or more of the identified key players on KMSL in the WASH sector. Most events have a continental outreach but only two address the region specifically.

Two newsletters are published fairly regularly in French language, none exclusively in English language, and one in English and French (RWSN). The number of regional organisations publishing documents relevant for the region on their websites is diverse (IRC, pS-Eau, WSP and to a lesser extent RWSN, do this regularly). Governmental organizations such as the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW) mainly post political resolutions, guidance for member states, and reports/ proceedings of meetings or events. Publications are available in French, though these are usually limited to country-specific experiences in French speaking countries. Relevant themes such as sector monitoring and sector financing are not reflected in the publications and are not centrally available. For example publications and information on monitoring WASH service delivery is limited and scattered over different pages and sources and therefore not easy to find. pS-Eau is the main organization that makes French publications accessible through its on-line database.

Strengths and weaknesses in the KMSL practices of regional organisations

The study shows that in West and Central Africa, regional sector players do together have a wide range of experiences with organisational KMSL. Organisations and networks provide for a wide range of information and knowledge products using a variety of dissemination channels.

A few key points are noted on the strengths of KMSL in the regional organisations:

- Publications on organisation’s websites, presentation at events and the use of a dedicated mailing lists are the most popular channels and platforms used for disseminating information and knowledge products by individual organisations.
- National governments and NGO staff are among the priority audience of the KMSL activities. This seems to be positive in terms of achieving scale.
- Some, organisations do have experience in monitoring and tracking the use of the disseminated knowledge.
- Regular information exchange meetings, websites and publications are among the most common platforms and mechanisms for KMSL being offered by the networks, partnerships and alliances. Options for participation in communities of practice and e- discussions are limited.
- Representatives of sector organisations and staff of networks, partnerships and alliances regularly participate in sector networks and events relevant for WASH and they appreciate the benefits of participation mainly for networking and sharing of organisational experiences with a broader audience. The Africa-specific events are most popular for networking and sharing organisational experiences.

The main weaknesses of KMSL in West and Central Africa cited in the study are as follows:

- Limited availability of information and knowledge products on hygiene and sanitation.
- Limited information and knowledge products are available in French compared to English.
- There is limited use of social media for knowledge transfer and dissemination of knowledge products.
- Knowledge development and dissemination activities exclude a number of relevant players for advancement of the WASH sector. The private sector (including utilities) and academia are hardly targeted in the KMSL activities performed by the identified organisations and networks.
- The channels for sharing information and knowledge such as websites, newsletters, publications and social media are not used to their full potential. Examples are: websites are often static and not regularly updated, newsletters are not frequently published and publications are often not organised by topic and are scattered over the websites of many organisations and therefore difficult to find.
- Few successful examples with using virtual means for knowledge sharing and interactive learning activities are available.
- Monitoring and tracking the use and impact of dissemination and learning activities is limited.

Discussion of findings

This mapping exercise was not intended as an in-depth analysis of the underlying factors explaining the current support capacity for KMSL in the West and Central Africa Region. It was limited to highlighting the existing capacities and identifying issues that would need further research in order to fully understand the potential for improved KMSL and the enhanced impact on WASH performance in the region.

Capacity for KMSL is available but is fragmented

The overall conclusion regarding the existing capacity for KMSL is that there is a broad range of organisations with a commitment to KMSL in support of the development of the WASH sector in West and Central African countries. Many of these regional organisations have a minimum capacity for KMSL activities. Most of the organisations and networks/ alliances active in West and Central Africa countries have a global or Africa- continental agenda. Only few have a dedicated agenda for supporting KMSL in countries in the Central or West Africa region. An even smaller number of those are exclusively focused on WASH. The results of the study that point to an important role of one training institution (2iE in Burkina Faso) with a strong regional outreach in addressing the technical WASH training needs of francophone organisations and sector professionals, merits an assessment of the potential roles of such institutes.

Gaps for successful regional KMSL

Concerning strengths and weaknesses of the regional actors in KMSL the overall conclusion is that there are many positive experiences with KMSL practices implemented by a substantive group of regional (and global) sector players. However these practices are fragmented and not consistently implemented. Because there is no feedback loop between the “supply” of KM products and dissemination by the support organisations and the “demand / uptake” by users, it’s difficult to judge the relevance and effectiveness of the current KMSL activities in the West and Central Africa Region. Another important finding is that the (WASH) development sector largely ignores the potential role of two important actors in knowledge generation and capacity development; namely academia and the private sector.

Potential for improved KMSL and enhanced impact on WASH service delivery

The study results demonstrate the clear potential for strengthening KMSL activities through the enhancement and further mobilisation of existing capacities as well as by ensuring better coordination. There’s sufficient scope to strengthen the collective impact of the KMSL activities on the development of the WASH sector in West and Central Africa.

There is a need for methodological guidance on how to develop national capacities for KMSL. Regionally rooted institutions such as WSA, ECCAS and ECOWAS identified as potential regional leads for filling a gap in leadership and coordination are yet not recognised for their KMSL activities in WASH. Regional leadership for KMSL is also constrained by the French-English language divide in the region. Among the global institutions identified for a potential lead role in KMSL for the region, only a few, including UNICEF WCARO, have a dedicated programme or (KMSL) strategy for West and Central Africa.

In the absence of a natural and regionally rooted lead with the needed capacities for driving and supporting KMSL in the sub-region, the right partnership(s) that allow for combining local and (sub-) regionally rooted KMSL capacities with the experience and knowledge of global players with a strong track record in KMSL seems appropriate.

Reflections on the way forward

The mapping of regional capacity shows that there is general agreement on the importance of learning but the awareness on how KMSL can contribute to improved sector performance in West and central Africa is still emerging. At the regional level, the role and influence of global WASH institutions in learning is still dominant. The risks posed by this strong global presence in the regional learning processes are that (i) the learning agenda is less focused on WCAR-specific issues and, (ii) capacity from the region is less used and/or developed. The high “global” representation in events and platforms points to a need for stronger African ownership of KMSL.

WASH services and practices are delivered at the country- level and therefore the primary focus of KMSL should also be on the in-country processes and stakeholders. However, at the regional level, platforms like AMCOW, AfricaSan and African Water Week have the potential to develop a more systematic, and relevant

learning agenda. Training institutes like 2iE in Burkina Faso, KNUST in Ghana and NWRI in Nigeria can serve as regional clearinghouses for information and state-of-the-art capacity building.

The KMSL networks of the future should reach out in a more structured manner to academia and the private sector. Further study is needed to better understand the potential of training institutions and academia in KMSL in the region and the largely untapped knowledge and learning resources in the private sector, particularly concerning the experiences within the utilities and the other private sector service providers.

Ultimately, building and strengthening regional and national capacities for more Africa-centred knowledge development and learning will require an explicit commitment and dedicated resources from national governments, donors and all other development partners. This can be achieved best by a mix of institutional and programmatic arrangements. For effective uptake and development of concepts, methods, tools and standards for the WASH sector in Africa, the processes need to be led by Africa actors and institutions. Leadership by a regionally rooted Africa based organisation, like AMCOW, is needed to set the Africa Agenda for Learning- owned by African governments and other sector stakeholders in the region.

Such leadership will help to ensure that collective efforts have a greater impact on the development of the WASH sectors in the countries of the region. The WASH sector can learn from other sectors (such as agriculture) on how this leadership role can be best fulfilled. In this light the options of a strategic partnership between international institutions such as UNICEF, IRC, WSP, WaterAid, pS-Eau and others with a strong international track-record and global recognition, with regionally rooted institutions that can provide for a sustainable anchor for KMSL will need further exploration.

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Note

¹ Based on an agreement between IRC and AMCOW, a number of sector partners are collaborating on implementation of a joint learning agenda and strategy for WASH in Africa.

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